BUILDING BETTER ORGANIZATIONAL REBRANDS:
EXPLORING THE EMPLOYEE VIEWPOINT

BY

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ABSTRACT

Organizational brands can be powerful, and it is risky to rebrand and potentially alienate stakeholders with a change (Abramovich, 2014). Yet, despite its high failure rate and cost, rebranding has become commonplace (Zhao, Calantone, & Voorhees, 2018). Research on the topic of organizational rebranding is considered to be in an early stage and so far, researchers have largely ignored the employee perspective of rebranding initiatives (Chad, 2016). In this qualitative case study, the employees' views of a rebranding initiative were explored, including their perspectives on how to engage them to strengthen buy-in and alignment with the new brand. Interviews—supported by multiple sources—were the primary form of data collection. Individual and group interviews were conducted with selected employees of a nonprofit private university in California that recently engaged in the process of rebranding. The data were triangulated and reported in comparative tables and in narrative form. The findings from this study reinforce prior rebranding research by Miller, Merrilees, and Yakimova (2014) about enablers and barriers and also contribute to the literature by adding employees' perspectives and by proposing two new barriers to successful organizational rebrands. A better understanding of employee viewpoints will help organizations to build better rebrands with their stakeholders, including customers, organization leaders, organizers of these initiatives and, of course, with employees.

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DEDICATION

For my children, Hadley, Tyler and Ally. You can accomplish anything.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The first person I met at City University of Seattle (CityU) was Dr. Laura Williamson who came to campus during her holiday break just to answer my questions. We talked about the meaning of CityU's tagline, "It's About the Finish." At the time, I did not know what it would take to write a dissertation, but Dr. Williamson actively displayed the faculty's dedication to helping students figure it out. One reason I chose to attend CityU was based on that conversation. It was an excellent decision.

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I am indebted to the wonderful participants who took part in the study and, unfortunately, must remain anonymous. I enjoyed our honest conversations that made me feel like the study served an important purpose beyond fulfillment of my dissertation. I am particularly grateful to the one special person who helped match me with the organization featured in my case study and also to the president of the organization whose strong endorsement of the study went a long way to make me feel so welcome during the field work.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Branding began about 2,700 B.C. when Egyptian farmers marked their cattle to protect their assets, as depicted in Figure 1.1. Over the years the term *branding*, which originates from "burning stick" in Old English (Bhasin, 2018), has also been associated with some unpleasant parts of history, such as marking people as possessions (i.e., slaves) or using marks like swastikas to label organizations and inspire movements.

Fast forward to the *mad men* in the 1960s who developed brands for products—from cars, to cigarettes, to soap. Branding as a business phenomenon appears to have grown from the need to differentiate products that were becoming commodities. This type of branding identified distinguishing features and benefits of products and later expanded to include organizational branding with emotional appeals to all stakeholders, such as Nike's iconic "Just Do It" tagline. The strategic power and monetary value of organizational brands are now widely recognized. The definition of branding and related terms will be fully explored in Chapter 2.

Rebranding is a relatively new concept and is considered under researched. Rebranding an organization indicates something about the organization has changed,

Figure 1.1. Origins of branding. Used with permission from "Ancient Egypt [Branding the Cattle]" by Cavanders, 2016, in the George Arents Collection by The New York Public Library.

such as a merger, an acquisition, or a new strategic focus. Stuart and Muzellec (2004) suggested that change is accomplished by creating a new beginning for the brand by changing its logo, slogan, or name. Apple Computer repositioned itself as Apple to attract a new, more diversified customer base (DeMers, 2016). The range of ways to rebrand an organization will be reviewed in Chapter 2.

Organizational rebranding is risky. It can be expensive, and initiatives frequently fail (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). One well-known example is Tropicana, the juice brand. The company overhauled the packaging design so greatly that customers could not recognize the product in stores (Lippert, 2017). The rebrand cost $35 million, and the company soon reverted to the original design amid a 20% drop in sales (Lippert, 2017).

Machiavelli (2016) observed that it is dangerous to introduce a new order of things because allies may not be willing to support the new system. The implication in terms of organizational rebranding is that organizations cannot assume they will have employee support for the new brand, even though it will be required to fulfill the new organizational brand promise (Stuart, 2012).

Employees play a critical role in representing the brand of an organization to customers (Spear, 2015), yet little is known about how to engage employees in a rebrand to ensure they are aligned in representing the brand and contributing to a successful outcome (Chad, 2016). The aim of the study was to gain a better understanding of the employee viewpoint of a rebranding initiative, which will offer answers about how to build better rebrands for all stakeholders, including employees.

Study Background/Foundation

An overview of the current state of the topic of rebranding is provided in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, there is a full review of the literature and an identification of the gap in the literature that is explored in subsequent chapters. There is detailed terminology about branding and rebranding in Chapter 2, along with definitions of related concepts, such as internal branding, repositioning, and employer branding to facilitate a more in-depth understanding of the core topic of rebranding.

Current State

Broadly speaking, while organizational branding is often researched, rebranding is not (Chad, 2016). Rebranding is regarded as an "emerging" area of research (Miller, Merrilees, & Yakimova, 2014) and has also been described as "embryonic" (Juntunen, 2014). Rebranding initiatives often require a considerable investment by organizations but are risky, as there is no guarantee of successful outcomes (Fan, Lo, Yeung, & Cheng, 2018). Researchers believe there are more failures than successes (Singh, Tripathi, & Yadav, 2012), which reinforces the importance to better understand the nature and performance implications that can lead to successful rebranding decisions.

Measuring the results of organizational rebranding can be difficult (Miller et al., 2014); however, several researchers have offered ways to define rebranding success for organizations as outlined in Chapter 2. It is helpful to understand the research about defining and measuring organizational rebranding success before reviewing the employees' descriptions of rebranding, which are provided in Chapter 4.

Researchers have identified employees as the most significant factor in projecting an organization's brand (Stuart, 2012). Müller (2017) concurred by declaring "employees are the brand message" (p. 894). However, without employee buy-in and engagement, a rebranding is not likely to be successful (Chad, 2016). Therefore, it is important to fully understand the current literature about the importance of employees to brand representation and how to effectively inform and align employees with a new brand to achieve buy-in. The latter type of research looks at training and development methods and ways to communicate with employees to establish commitment.

A review of research about ways to align employees with organizational objectives provides a solid background before reviewing the participants' suggestions on what type of engagement works (and what does not) to achieve buy-in and alignment with their new organizational brand.

The Gap

There is a much deeper dive into the research in Chapter 2, but the evidence is clear that there is a deficiency in the current literature on the topic of organizational rebranding. Researchers have recognized that while employees play a critical role in creating branding experiences with an organization's customers (Spear, 2015), the internal branding of employees has been neglected by scholars (Müller, 2018). Researchers have further claimed it is important to understand how employees perceive the brand management process (Bravo, Buil, de Chernatony, & Martínez, 2017), yet admit that the employee view of rebranding initiatives has been largely ignored (Chad, 2016). What is missing is the employee perspective of a rebranding initiative. That is the gap in the current literature, and that gap is explored in the present study. Understanding the viewpoint of this vital stakeholder group generates ideas to enable organizations to deliver better rebranding initiatives in the future.

Key Theories

A seminal rebranding study by Merrilees and Miller (2008) created a holistic model of rebranding with six fundamental principles that have served as a platform for subsequent rebranding research. A later study, by Miller et al. (2014), enhanced the model by listing specific enablers and barriers to successful rebranding initiatives. Chad (2016) confirmed the same criteria applied to non-profit organizations. With the additional perspective of employees, the present study both reinforces and advances these foundational studies.

The Problem

Branding is often studied, yet rebranding is not. In fact, rebranding is considered to be in the embryonic stage in terms of research (Chad, 2016). Rebranding exercises often require considerable investment but without any guarantee of achieving successful outcomes (Fan et al., 2018). Changing how customers perceive an organization’s brand is risky, as core customers can become disenchanted with its new brand promise (Abramovich, 2014). The general problem is that organizational rebrands are important and expensive (Stuart, 2018), yet these initiatives have a high degree of failure.

Employees are the most significant factor in projecting an organization’s brand (Stuart, 2012) and without employee buy-in, a rebranding is not likely to be successful (Chad, 2016). Yet, the employee viewpoint has been largely ignored in rebranding initiatives, and little is known about how to engage employees in a rebranding to best achieve buy-in (Chad, 2016).

The Problem Statement

The problem is organizational rebrands can be expensive and risky and are conducted without any guarantee of success. Employees play a critical role in representing the brand of an organization to customers, and employee buy-in is vital to the success of a rebranding initiative, yet the employee viewpoint of rebranding has largely been ignored by researchers.

Scope. The research for the present study was conducted at a nonprofit private university in California that is involved in an organizational rebrand. The fact that the featured organization is a nonprofit and a private higher education organization is deemed irrelevant to the study as the study focus is to explore the viewpoint of employees. There was a hole in the rebranding literature that ignored the employee perspective, and that gap was the priority of this study. While the literature review includes research about both nonprofit and for-profit organizations, including some organizations from the higher education sector, the research questions in the present study were focused on the viewpoint of employees and not on the type of organization or sector of an industry. Possibly, future studies will narrow the scope and consider the impact of the kind of organization or industry.

Audience

Stakeholders of organizational rebrands will benefit from learning more about the employee perspective of rebranding initiatives and ways to engage employees to achieve buy-in for the rebrand. Stakeholders who are involved with a rebrand may include organization leaders, rebrand organizers, employees at all levels, investors (i.e., in the case of a nonprofit university, the various providers of funding), and customers (in this case, students of the university will be referred to as customers). Guilbault (2018) stated that higher education should be driven by focusing on students as customers. While students view themselves as customers, Guilbault reported this view is often not accepted by academics. To be clear, throughout this study, students are referred to as customers.

Business administration connection. In the 1990s, companies began to perceive the organization brand as a valuable strategic asset and a force that can guide an organization concerning its purpose and culture (Balmer, Powell, Kernstock, & Brexendorf, 2017). Today, rebranding has become a significant part of an organization's strategy (Stuart, 2018).

The potential for creating an empty brand message is significant if leaders do not "walk the talk" and demonstrate the new strategic direction regarding the organization's culture (Stuart, 2018). Leaders can use this study to inform their rebranding practice by better understanding how employees view the rebranding process, which should contribute to the achievement of better rebranding outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this proposed study was to explore how employees view the rebranding process. An improved understanding of the employee viewpoint of a rebranding initiative contributes to building better overall rebrands for organizations and their stakeholders, including employees.

Methodology Overview

The design strategy was a qualitative case study with interviews and direct and participant-observations of employees of a nonprofit private university in California that was undergoing various forms of a rebranding initiative. Other sources of evidence included documentation, archival records, and physical artifacts. Results are reported in first-person, where appropriate, in line with the recommendation by Braun and Clarke (2014) that qualitative research is best reported using a first-person, active tense.

Yin (2018) suggested case studies are ideal for program evaluation, such as an organizational rebranding initiative. Researchers often use case studies to draft success stories that are used to demonstrate the effectiveness of programs (Creswell, 2014). Miller and Merrilees (2013) suggested, "Case studies are the hallmark research approach for corporate rebranding studies" (p. 174).

A sample of 14 participants was purposefully selected from the population of the more than 100 full-time faculty and staff members of a nonprofit private university, in California, currently involved in a rebranding initiative. Employees were purposefully selected to contribute to answering the research questions as suggested by Creswell (2014). The participating organization's marketing head assisted in the selection of employees for the interviews. The details of the selection process and confidentiality are covered in Chapter 3.

Research Questions

Given the background of the study and the stated problem about the lack of research about the employee perspective of rebranding initiatives, there was an opportunity to fill the gap with research about the employee viewpoint. The objective of my research was to explore the employee perspective by seeking the answers to two research questions:

1. How do employees describe a rebranding experience?

2. What are the employees' perceptions of ways to engage them in achieving buy-in and alignment with the new brand?

By exploring the current gap in the research, this study contributes to the research on rebranding.

Study Limitations

Rebranding initiatives can span long periods, often without a definite ending to the process. Employee responses might be different if they were asked the same interview questions a few months later. On the other hand, if interviews with employees or study findings are considered, the organization may be able to make course corrections. Another limitation is that employees or executives may not have answered the interview questions truthfully. Information obtained through interviews is subject both to the perceptions of the interviewee (Creswell, 2014) and the interpretation of the researcher (Lacy, 2017). This limitation was mitigated through the use of multiple sources of data collection, such as observation and document review.

University leadership may not have selected employees that were representative of the employee population; however, observation of the all-employee session offered insights into the perspective of the broader employee population for comparison.

Summary

Chad (2015) reminded us of the call for future branding research to cover "neglected" areas of branding. Research has lacked examination of rebranding from an employee perspective (Melewar, Gotsi, & Andriopoulos, 2012). Given that employees' perceptions can influence their attitudes and behaviors, and, in turn, affect their customers' experiences, it would be useful to understand how employees perceive the rebranding process (Bravo et al., 2017).

The significance of the study is that when organizations better understand how the rebranding decisions and experiences impact employees, then organizations can make more informed decisions about this significant investment. Improved decision making has the potential to benefit any or all of the stated audiences.

The new research is truly successful when lessons learned from a better understanding of the employee perspective of a rebranding initiative lead to improved outcomes. Understanding the employee viewpoint in a rebranding initiative offers insight to organizers of future rebranding initiatives as they seek to achieve strong rebranding outcomes for all stakeholders: building better rebrands. Chapter 2 sets the stage with a detailed look at the current research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 provides a deeper understanding of the topic of rebranding based on the literature. Essential background and terminology about branding and rebranding are introduced along with a look at theories about rebranding. Next, there is an overview of the amount of rebranding literature that is available, followed by a full review of the literature, including a look at how researchers define successful outcomes of rebranding initiatives, the connection between employees and brand representation, and how to train and communicate with employees to achieve buy-in and alignment with organizational objectives, such as a new brand. Lastly, the methodology is previewed.

Branding and Rebranding Terminology

An organization's brand is the visual, verbal and behavioral expression of an organization's unique business model (Everett, 2016). An organization's brand features many touchpoints, as shown in Figure 2.1, as an organization builds its profile among key stakeholders, including customers, employees, and investors (Iglesias, Ind, & Alfaro, 2017). The most visible aspects of a brand are an organization's name, tagline, and logo (Hankinson, Lomax, & Hand, 2007).

A brand can function as a powerful differentiator for an organization and as a decision-making tool for customers (Girard, Trapp, Pinar, Gulsoy, & Boyt, 2017). Promoting entire companies as brands has become an efficient way to create differentiation, especially for companies with multiple product lines, where branding an

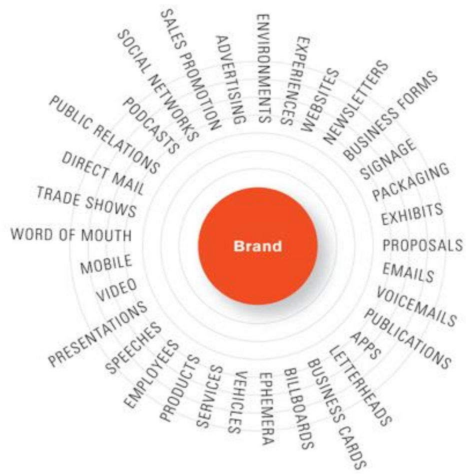

Figure 2.1. Brand touchpoints. From *Designing Brand Identity: An Essential Guide for the Whole Branding Team* (p. 3), by A. Wheeler, 2017, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons. Copyright 2018 by Alina Wheeler.

organization can reduce communication costs and create synergies among brands under a corporate brand umbrella (Chang, Chiang, & Han, 2015).

Rebranding is a signal that something about the organization has changed (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004), such as revising any or all of the major brand elements including organization name, logo, symbol, or tagline (Roy & Sarkar, 2015). Once the decision has been made to rebrand an organization, the cost and benefits that would justify the rebranding should be determined along with “how and to what extent the brand should be changed” (Merrilees & Miller, 2008, p. 538), which can vary for each rebranding initiative.

As illustrated in Figure 2.2, rebranding can describe cosmetic changes (the *x* axis), changes in positioning (the *y* axis), or a combination of both. There are also various degrees of change—from minor to major, or even revolutionary. For example, the rebranding continuum can range from a simple logo refresh to an entirely new logo, or even renaming the organization (Singh et al., 2012).

Figure 2.2. Rebranding as a continuum. From "Corporate Rebranding: Destroying, Transferring or Creating Brand Equity?" by L. Muzellec and M. Lambkin, 2006, *European Journal of Marketing, 40,* p. 805. Copyright 2006 by Emerald Group.

Corporate rebranding differs from *product* rebranding in that corporate rebranding involves multiple stakeholders and considers their relationships to one another, changes to culture, and identity and image, including any new logos or taglines with new meanings (Lee & Bourne, 2017). Corporate branding also differs from product branding in that it is considered more strategic; it should include internal branding with employees and typically is controlled by senior management, including the chief executive officer (Miller & Merrilees, 2008). This study is focused on *organizational rebranding*, a term that will be used interchangeably with *corporate branding* in this report, as the lessons of corporate branding apply across all types of organizations (Chad, 2016; Merrilees, 2017).

Repositioning as a form of rebranding means assigning a new meaning to the organization and communicating the new benefits to stakeholders (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). Rebranding should be conducted for logical and rational reasons (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004) and only if the organizational change is “of sufficient magnitude to suggest the need for a fundamental redefinition of its identity” (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006, p. 810).

Reasons to Rebrand

In general, organizations implement corporate rebranding to rejuvenate their company and to enhance the brand value and increase organizational performance (Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018). Specific reasons to rebrand include: (a) mergers or acquisitions; (b) structural, strategic, or management changes; (c) new senior leadership; (d) shifts in the marketplace; (e) image update; (f) distancing oneself from a bad image; (g) a new range of operations; (h) new organizational focus/vision; or (i) competitive reasons (Hankinson et al., 2007). Changing the name of an organization can be compelling. Some examples are provided in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Examples of Organization Name Changes

Original Name	Present Name
Zim Ride	Lyft
Brad’s Drink	Pepsi- Cola
Backrub	Google
Andersen Consulting	Accenture
Blue Ribbon Sports	Nike
Beaver College	Arcadia University
Calhoun College (Yale University)	Grace Hopper College (Yale University)
American Association for Retired Persons	AARP

Note. Data collected from Brighter Naming (2014), Brooks (2017), and Norris (2015).

When an organization or its environment changes, the organization may invest a significant amount to change the logo to underscore and draw attention to the rebranding (Bolhuis, De Jong, & Van den Bosch, 2018). There are many visual examples of logo changes for organizations that wished to reflect strategic change, such as Nike, which began as a footwear company and evolved to become a sportswear and wearables organization. Its logo changed, as shown in Figure 2.3, occurred at strategic times that paralleled the evolution of the company (Daye, 2015).

Figure 2.3. Nike Logo Evolution. From “Brand and Brand Repositioning Examples,” by D. Daye, 2015. Copyright 2015 by Branding Strategy Insider, a service of The Blake Project.

Leaving the name and logo unchanged but revising an organization’s tagline can also reflect a strategic repositioning. The University of Rhode Island wanted to reposition its image and created an in-house brand committee with representatives from all stakeholder groups. The group developed a new positioning statement that not only captured the imagination of external stakeholders but earned support from faculty and staff. This repositioning was widely successful as evidenced by a 2014 episode of the TV game show Jeopardy in which the contestant was able to answer correctly, “What is the University of Rhode Island?” to the statement, “A knowingly ironic slogan of this New England university is ‘Think Big We Do’” (Dholakia & Acciardo, 2014, p. 161), as depicted in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4. University of Rhode Island tagline. From "Branding a State University: Doing it Right," by R. R. Dholakia and L. A. Acciardo, 2014, *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 24*, p. 155. Copyright 2014 by Taylor and Francis.

Internal branding describes the practice of branding employees as a means to communicate the brand to customers. Internal branding advocates describe the goal of internal branding as the alignment of employees with the brand and that the employees' behaviors, attitudes, outward appearances and use of language become "branded."

Employer branding is about an organization's image and describes targeted branding to recruit new hires. Typically requested by human resource departments, it directs a version of the corporate brand to attract the prospective employees, whereas internal branding, also described as employee branding, is focused on identity and branding current employees of the organization (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

Rebranding Theory

Corporate rebranding is considered to have started in the 1990s (Stuart, 2018). Miller and Merrilees (2008) suggested that the original theory of corporate rebranding was based on a compilation of the findings from four classic case studies of organizations, which are summarized in Table 2.2.

While employees are not directly identified in the theoretical contributions listed in Table 2.2, internal branding, which involves employees, is listed twice. Additionally, stakeholder management, which would include the employee audience, is listed.

Table 2.2

Case Studies That Drove Original Corporate Rebranding Theory

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

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

Miller and Merrilees (2008) extended the original amalgamated theory of corporate rebranding by explicitly identifying six principles as a set of parameters for an organizational rebranding. Three of the principles guided revisions to the corporate vision, one was related to the need to obtain stakeholder buy-in, and two principles related to the implementation process—the latter three all touched on employees. The researchers used a single case study to test the six proposed principles. They reinforced the principles' framework of corporate rebranding and clarified how each principle works in practice with the other principles to ensure that the updated theory provided a holistic and strategic approach to rebranding.

Miller et al. (2014) evolved and advanced the theory of corporate rebranding by specifying six *enablers* and five *barriers*, as listed in Table 2.3, that inform rebranding practice and improve corporate rebranding outcomes. Enablers are the essential drivers that enable the rebranding to be successfully achieved, and the most critical enabler was found to be leadership. Barriers impede the rebranding process and inhibit success. The most significant barrier to a successful outcome was found to be an autocratic rebranding approach, which also ties to leadership. Enablers can help to prevent or overcome barriers. Thus, managers should endeavor to adopt enablers to overcome barriers and to promote strong rebranding outcomes.

Table 2.3

Enablers and Barriers to Successful Rebranding Initiatives

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

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

Miller et al. (2014) studied 76 cases from 61 articles to develop their list of enablers and barriers and found that many of the items spanned multiple phases of the rebranding process. The phases are: (a) defining the revised brand, (b) internal branding activities aimed at stakeholders' buy-in, and (c) implementation through an integrated approach in the final phase.

While employees are not explicitly identified as an enabler group, their involvement can be inferred in the principles of *brand understanding*, *internal branding activities*, *stakeholder coordination,* and an *integrated marketing program*, which would combine both internal and external marketing plans. The first two barriers of *an autocratic approach* and *stakeholder tensions* also involve consideration of the employee audience in a rebranding initiative. The authors went so far as to emphasize that corporate rebranding should be supported by stakeholder input along with a consideration of their needs (Miller et al., 2014), but the researchers did not solicit the employee viewpoint in the development of their theory, a theory which is part of the amalgamated model for rebranding studies today.

There is branding research by Merrilees (2017) that emphasized the rising importance of experiential corporate branding as the purported customers buy a product or service along with an experience. McDonald's hamburgers, in the 1950s and 1960s, and Disney, were cited as examples of pioneering corporate brands that created experiences for customers. Merrilees further proposed a traffic light model of red, green, and amber (in lieu of yellow) to measure the impact of organizational branding experiences. The model emphasized that there is an opportunity for organizations to convert those middle ground amber experiences that fall short of being positive (on-brand/green light) experiences but still are not negative (off-brand/red light) experiences. He used Airbnb and Uber as current examples of organizations that disrupted their industries and converted amber brand experiences of somewhat dissatisfied hotel and taxi customers into successful new business models.

While Merrilees' (2017) recent research was focused on branding versus rebranding, brands, in either case, are co-created through experiences between an organization and its stakeholders, especially employees (Spear, 2015). However, while employees play a critical role in experiential branding, their viewpoints are not covered by current theories about rebranding.

Rebranding Research

Rebranding initiatives have become increasingly commonplace across all types of organizations. Many for-profit organizations strive to be considered more socially responsible, while nonprofit organizations try to become more commercially oriented; these organizations have turned to rebranding as part of the solution (Stuart, 2018). Despite rebranding becoming mainstream, the topic has received little academic attention (Singh et al., 2012), and rebranding is considered an "embryonic" area of research (Juntunen, 2014).

Existing organizational rebranding research has typically focused on the leadership, consumer perspective, or successful examples (Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018). Literature regarding employee involvement in rebranding is "limited despite its importance" (Hankinson et al., 2007, p. 237); therefore, employee roles provide a valuable area for research (Lee, 2017).

Successful Rebranding Outcomes

While the act of organizational rebranding is considered mainstream, rebranding literature has described rebranding initiatives as "risky" (Fan et al., 2018) and has stated these initiatives fail more often than they succeed (Singh et al., 2012). Failed for-profit rebranding initiatives dilute an organization's value in the marketplace (Abramovich, 2014).

Overall, rebranding has an even higher degree of difficulty than branding because it poses a higher degree of risk regarding the possibility of confusion among stakeholders, especially customers (Todor, 2014). Organizations have a limited understanding of what level of success is even possible (Zhao et al., 2018), and rebranding failures are rarely studied for lessons learned (Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018).

The increased popularity of rebranding coupled with the substantial risk of failure raised questions about how rebranding success or failure is measured and what factors contribute to a successful rebranding initiative. While there is no consensus or definitive way to measure rebranding results, a further review of the literature provided some options.

Pioneering case study researchers on the topic of rebranding reported that measuring results of organizational rebranding can be difficult (Miller & Merrilees, 2008; Miller et al., 2014), however, Miller et al. (2014) used the following three indicators of rebranding success during their hallmark study to classify the success of 76 cases: (a) increases in measures of business success (i.e., profitability, sales, favorable reputation or image); (b) whether the case achieved the stated objectives for the rebranding; and (c) strong, positive references to the overall case or critical aspects of the case. Cases were then categorized as having either "strong" or "weak" outcomes. Strong outcomes represented cases with one or more of the three positive indicators. Weak outcomes resulted when none of the three indicators were present. These same indicators have been applied to other research cases. Note, none of the researchers' indicators directly identified employees as contributing to rebranding success. Researchers reported that strong outcome cases are more likely to have one or more major enablers from the list, and weak outcome cases are more likely to have one or more major barriers from the list (list previously shown in Table 2.3).

Other factors of success or failure noted in the literature. Tarnovskaya and Biedenbach (2018) analyzed a failed organizational rebranding for Gap. A newly launched logo (see Figure 2.5) only lasted a week before being reversed due to strong adverse reactions by multiple stakeholders, including a powerful backlash on social media.

Figure 2.5. The Gap’s original and failed logos. From “GAP: Six Years Later—Still Worst Rebrand Ever,” by G. Fraikin, 2016.

Researchers described how Gap’s internal marketing managers and senior leaders did not consult other stakeholders before launching the new brand (Fraikin, 2016). Gap’s leadership intended to reposition the company but instead introduced a visual change that preceded the planned product and brand repositioning; the new brand did not make sense to the other stakeholders. The $100 million rebranding initiative had failed (Fraikin, 2016). This example displayed several rebranding barriers introduced in Table 2.3

including autocratic rebranding approach, stakeholder tensions, inadequate research, and inadequate customer consideration.

Successful rebrands require extensive market research to ensure the new look or positioning will be positively received, so loyal customers do not feel as if the identity they know, and respect is being taken away (Bacon, 2016). However, successful rebranding also requires input from employees (Gotsi & Andriopoulos, 2007). This combination could have helped Gap if the company's leaders had developed a broader-based employee view and generated external market data. This approach would have reinforced the enablers of stakeholder coordination and integrated marketing plan and would have helped to avoid the potential barriers of inadequate market research and inadequate customer consideration barriers from Miller et al.'s (2014) research.

Failure to either align with the strategy, culture, or expectations can doom a rebranding initiative. Stuart (2018) described organizational rebranding as a "strategic event or series of events" (p. 99), and, to be successful, it must be aligned with the overarching organization strategy. Stuart (2018) also noted rebranding should be conducted with an understanding of the organization's culture and the expectations of its stakeholders, which would include employees.

Who performs the rebranding was also found to impact the success of an initiative. Organizational rebranding, especially revolutionary rebranding, is a significant undertaking and requires appropriate knowledge and experience. Due to the infrequency of rebranding, most organizations do not possess relevant in-house rebranding knowledge and should consider using external brand consultants; however, management often underestimates the demands and the details of the process and often does not seek outside expertise (Chad, 2016). Even when external branding consultants manage the initial rebranding, the implementation ultimately becomes the responsibility of the organization’s marketing or communications staff. Their role is crucial to the success of rebranding as they understand the culture and are key stakeholders in its effectiveness (Hankinson et al., 2007).

As rebranding is often a driver of change, the new brand does not always reflect the cultural status quo. Gotsi, Andriopoulos, and Wilson (2008) suggested that leadership should communicate the desired change and its implications clearly and reasonably and reconcile the rebranding within the context of the true culture. The researchers further reported that employees may need to shift their current mindset to be realigned with the new brand for a successful rebranding to occur and that realignment should be a collaborative process between leadership and employees to be successful.

With employee buy-in, a rebranding is more likely to be successful. Conversely, without employee buy-in, a rebranding is likely to fail (Chad, 2016). Rebranding “is a complex process that requires organization-wide buy-in and an appreciation of the challenges involved in aligning subcultures” (Gotsi et al., 2008, pp. 55-56). When employees actively participate in a rebranding initiative, they generate a stronger brand commitment compared to weaker commitments from employees who received imposed guidelines based on behavior compliance (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Bolhuis et al. (2018) reported positive rebranding results when communications with employees were participative, changes aligned with core values, and leaders clearly explained the rationale for the rebranding.

Researchers reported that it is dangerous to put employees on the receiving end of a rebranding initiative, and it is naïve to adopt an externally driven, public relations-based approach to organization brand management, which can lead to a weak rebranding outcome (Gotsi et al., 2008). Merrilees and Miller (2008) suggested a “fruitful” area of research would develop a greater understanding of brand buy-in by employees. Academics have studied the role employees play in representing the brand which is reviewed next.

Employees Are Critical to Representing a Brand

Employees are the most significant factor in projecting an organization’s brand (Stuart, 2012). An organization’s brand is not merely the sum of a logo and advertising. It comes from the people within the organization and how they communicate in all forms and with all stakeholders. As Everett (2016) wrote, “Your people are your brand.” Everett (2016) used Figure 2.6 to reinforce the importance of people and how they communicate the brand. Everett’s diagram illustrates that while organizations use various forms of

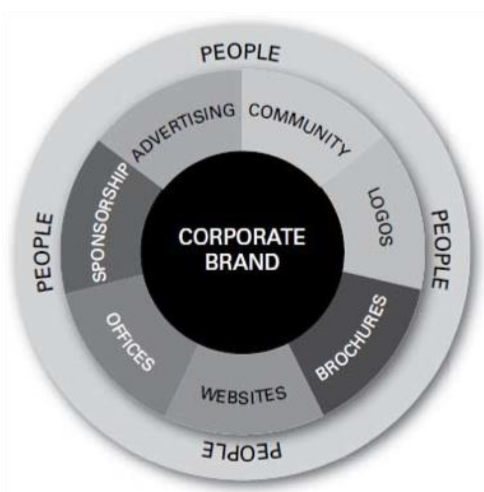

Figure 2.6. Brand Elements. From *Corporate Brand Personality: Re-Focus Your Organization’s Culture to Build Trust, Respect and Authenticity*, by L. Everett, 2016, Great Britain: Kogan Page Limited. Copyright 2016 by Lesley Everett.

communication, such as logos, advertising, and sponsorships to represent their brand, it is up to the people within an organization and how they communicate with stakeholders to

Stuart (2012) concurred that employees are especially critical to the rebranding process and suggested employees are expected to represent the new brand as enthusiastically as they presented the previous one, or even more so. To be successful, rebrands cannot be merely forced on employees (Spear, 2015). Employees are an essential part of an organization's brand, and they have to understand what the brand stands for, so they can "live the brand" (Melewar & Alwi, 2015, p. 39). Gotsi, Andriopoulos, and Wilson (2008) stated employees must first shift their existing mindset/culture to be realigned with the new organizational brand for a successful rebranding to occur.

Recently, one study examined the complex relationship between the activity of branding (externally) and being branded (internally). Branding that draws on employees' identities and lifestyle preferences and their moral values to build the brand from the outside in, was found to be more successful than branding that tries to convince employees to adapt to identities provided from the top down (Endrissat, Kärreman, & Noppeney, 2017). Thus, managers will need to accept a loss of control and be willing to share if they want to build a relevant brand image. The implication is that managers will need to develop a new leadership style that is more humble, open and participatory (Iglesias et al., 2017).

Overall, the relationship between employees and brands is still under-developed in research (Wegerer & Munro, 2018). Most of the research to date on brand orientation has paid little attention to how employees respond to changes in branding—and if they are aligned. This is despite employees considered as critical to the success of implementing the rebranding process, and research supports that they should be engaged early, openly, and honestly (Lee, 2017). This leads to the third and final primary area of research: how can organizations effectively engage employees to ensure they are aligned with the new brand?

Ways to Engage and Align Employees

While there is not a standard definition or way to measure employee engagement, organizational researchers have agreed on its importance. Employee engagement has been linked to productivity, customer service, absenteeism, and turnover (Towers Watson, 2012). In their 2018 study of nearly 1,000 employees, Othman, Mahmud, Noranee, found that employee happiness is important to ensure high productivity, and employee engagement is one of the critical drivers of employee happiness.

While engagement has the potential to impact an organization's performance positively, some ways can be more successful than others. In a global study by Towers Watson (2012) that was later validated in 22 countries, researchers found that organizations often failed to improve engagement because they were not "effectively enabling workers with internal support, resources and tools" (p. 4) and "creating an environment that's energizing to work in because it promotes physical, emotional and social well-being" (p. 4). The study led to the discovery that when organizations include a consideration of individual and environmental factors along with traditional organizational commitment techniques to achieve engaged employees, the results can include nearly triple higher operating margins, increased productivity, less absenteeism, and reduced turnover (Towers Watson, 2012).

Lombardi (2011) reported the best way to improve engagement is to strengthen the performance culture and that engagement is all about aligning individuals with the organization. When employees know what is expected of them, it becomes easier for them to execute against that. When they are clear on expectations, they can reap the rewards for meeting their goals and are motivated to do more of it, and thereby they improve both engagement and performance. What are some recommended ways to align employees?

Graziano (2016) offered five ways to create employee alignment: (a) share and inspire a compelling mission, (b) institutionalize and perpetuate guiding principles and values, (c) clearly articulate expectations and intended outcomes, (d) foster excitement and celebrate forward momentum, and (e) build trust through open communication and clarity. These suggestions tie to Merrilees and Yakimova’s (2014) rebranding enablers of strong rebranding leadership, internal branding activities, developing brand understanding, and the importance of having an integrated marketing program.

Direct participation by employees versus passive listening is reported to be especially productive and has been strongly associated with enhanced learning at work (Inanc, Zhou, Gallie, Felstead, & Green, 2015). As previously mentioned, researchers reported positive rebranding results when communications with employees were participative, aligned with core values, and explained the rationale (Bolhuis et al., 2018).

Corporate storytelling is another way for an organization to engage with employees. It is a practice with universal appeal that has significant strategic benefits for internal communication and employee engagement. According to Gill (2015), storytelling has the potential to persuade, motivate, and inspire employees about their organization, thereby strengthening internal loyalty and reputation.

The research in this section was an overview of ways to engage and align employees. There are a limited number of studies that have focused on employees' learning in organizations (Hewa Kuruppuge & Gregar, 2018), and none could be found that reported on the employees' viewpoint. Next, there is a review of literature specific to training employees about a new brand to understand the nuances involved with this unique form of training.

Training employees how to represent a new brand. The goal of internal marketing is to translate and communicate the brand values and brand promises made to customers via external marketing so that employees can deliver the brand promise via external marketing (Pinar, Girard, Trapp, & Eser, 2016). Du Preez and Bendizen (2015) suggested that internal marketing should precede external marketing—as a company should not promote excellent service before the company's staff is ready to provide it. These researchers also described internal brand management as a subset of internal marketing, described as "living the brand" (Du Preez & Bendizen, 2015, p. 78). The organization must translate the brand values into daily activities before the employees can live the brand (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017).

An essential step in a rebranding initiative is to first share the rationale for the rebranding (the purpose) to create support, understanding, and commitment for the rebranding, to have a chance of being accepted by employees (Stuart, 2012). Bolhuis et al. (2018) found both employees and consumers may appreciate a new visual identity, such as a logo change more when they are better informed about the background and purpose of the rebrand. These results are in line with findings from previous studies that confirmed the importance of involving employees in and informing them about significant organizational changes and how this is related to a new logo. However, when employees do not understand why the organization needed to change the corporate brand and, by implication, the organizational values and employee behavior, employees feel culturally misaligned with the rebrand (Gotsi & Andriopoulos, 2007).

Employees need to understand what the new brand means and what their role is to deliver the brand (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). Drafting a brand value statement can help employees understand the new brand, but it has to be memorable—short and to the point (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Branding expert Kevin Lane Keller suggested organizations adopt a three- to five-word *brand mantra* that captures the spirit of the brand and key points of difference, such as Nike's "Just Do It" (Srivastava & Thomas, 2015). Lane Keller explained while brand mantras are typically developed for internal purposes to rally employees around the organizational brand, some powerful mantras may transcend the company and become a brand slogan that is used externally.

When employees understand their revised brand and organizational branding responsibilities, they can commit to the rebranding effort (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). However, employee roles are often overlooked in a rebranding (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004).

Three forms of internal communication can be used to share information about the rebrand, and all must be aligned to be effective (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Figure 2.7 displays the three forms: central, cascade, and lateral communication. Each serves a purpose.

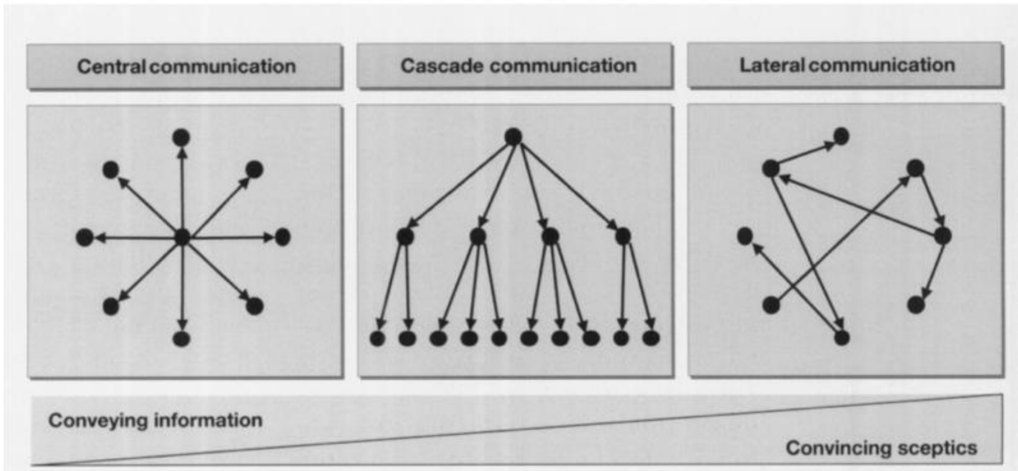

Figure 2.7. Three forms of internal communication. From “Building Brand Commitment: A Behavioural Approach to Internal Brand Management, by C. Burmann and S. Zeplin, 2005, *Journal of Brand Management 12,* p. 290. Copyright 2005 by Henry Stewart.

Centrally distributed internal communication can reach all employees and is useful for creating awareness, to reinforce the brand message, and to disseminate general brand information quickly. Cascading brand information is time-consuming, but it can feel more credible and relevant if the information comes from a supervisor. Lateral communications are the informal “grapevine” and are the most difficult to control, but the researchers reported lateral communications were the most effective way to produce brand commitment (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005).

Unfortunately, while internal branding activities have been found to be critical to communicating and delivering the brand promise to customers, organizations invest relatively little to ensure their employees understand how to translate brand messages into customers’ experiences (Bravo et al., 2017). This leads to evaluation of the investment.

Having engaged and aligned employees is a sound investment. Internal communication and engagement can pay off. Workforce engagement, the aggregate of individual employee engagement with the work itself, has both financial and customer consequences. In a study of 102 publicly traded firms, Schneider, Yost, Kropp, Kind, and Lam (2018) reported the primary driver of employee engagement was an environment where employees experience the organization as being goal directed and concerned about people. They recommended top management take “the bull by the horns” and make these practices real if they want an engaged workforce.

Similarly, in a study of 438 firms, researchers reported organizations with best-in-class performance have senior leaders that establish a culture of alignment and ongoing communication (Lombardi, 2011). The researchers also found that the top firms used employee engagement to create alignment between the needs, desires, skills, and activities of individuals with the business requirements to achieve results (Lombardi, 2011).

Researchers found there was a favorable impact from increased investment in employees at the Ghana Oil Company for training and incentives as part of an organizational rebranding initiative. The researchers stated that these investments “profoundly influenced employee performance” (Amoako, Okpattah, Gameti, & Attatsitsey, 2017, p. 107).

Everett (2016) indicated that investments in employee training are often minimized in favor of “non-human” elements, such as investments in rebranding graphics or new customer-service facilities. This is despite the determination that investments in training more directly impact creating positive customer experiences as these experiences come from the interaction customers have with employees in the organization. Everett added executive teams frequently did not pay enough attention to just how powerfully their corporate brand was projected to the outside world by employees, both positively and negatively.

Everett (2016) reported many CEOs and directors of large organizations agreed training employees how to interact with customers was a sound investment. Everett noted customer service training programs typically focused on the transactional elements of customer service and not on how to create authentic and outstanding experiences about which that customers will talk. Everett stated that training employees to demonstrate the personality of the brand would ultimately make a real difference and drive results. Not following this practice is “akin to designing and building a fabulous new sports car and not putting an engine in it!” (Everett, 2016, Chapter 2, para. 4).

Summary

Rebranding is about change. When an organization or its environment changes or wants to change, rebranding is one way to draw attention to the change and can aid in differentiating from the competition. Organizations may consider an organizational rebranding and are willing to invest large amounts of money in developing and implementing a new brand. In turn, organizations expect important benefits from a rebranding initiative (Bolhuis et al., 2018), even though some researchers claimed that there are more failures than successes (Singh et al., 2012).

It can be challenging to measure the success of a rebranding initiative. In a pioneering study of 76 for-profit and nonprofit organizations, researchers developed criteria to use as guidelines, along with a list of enablers that can lead to a successful rebranding initiative and barriers that can lead to failure (Merrilees et al., 2014).

Rebranding as a general topic is considered under-researched; however, there is sufficient research available in the three primary targeted areas: (a) defining and measuring successful rebranding initiatives, (b) the importance of employees in representing a brand, and (c) ways to engage employees to achieve alignment with organization goals such as a rebranding. There is limited research as far as how to conduct a successful rebranding (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). Because of the high cost and impact of a rebrand, it is vital to ensure effective implementation (Chad, 2016).

In the metaphor of a sports car to rebranding an organization introduced by Everett (2016), brand-trained and aligned employees are the engine that enables the car to move. Employees are instrumental in the co-creation of brand value (Balmer et al., 2017). All sources of brand identity are based on the decisions and actions of an organization’s employees (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Considering the vital role employees play in brand delivery, current research lacks examination of rebranding from an employee perspective (Melewar, Gotsi, & Andriopoulos, 2012).

Rebranding researchers have explored the view of top management, brand consultants, or customers around various aspects of rebranding but have ignored the average employee’s perspective. Researchers have been criticized for overemphasizing the managerial impact in the rebranding process and for not paying enough attention to understanding how brands are interpreted and constructed by other stakeholders, including employees (Wegerer & Munro, 2018).

Multi-stakeholder viewpoints are important in a rebranding initiative (Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018). Chad (2015) reported researchers have called for future branding research to cover “neglected” and “emerging or evolving” areas of branding. Given that employees’ perceptions can influence their attitudes and behaviors, and, in turn, affect their customers’ experiences, it would be useful to understand how employees perceive the brand management process (Bravo et al., 2017).

The Gap

The outcome of this study will be to contribute to rebranding literature by adding the employee perspective. The study will explore the gap in the literature, specifically the employees’ views about the rebranding experience and their perceptions of how to engage employees to achieve buy-in and alignment with the new brand. An improved understanding of the employee viewpoint in a rebranding initiative will offer insight to organizers of future rebranding initiatives as they seek to achieve strong rebranding outcomes for all stakeholders, building better rebrands.

Support for Methodology

As introduced in Chapter 1 and described in Chapter 3, this is a qualitative study. The design is a single case study with individual and group interviews, supported by archival information, documentation, physical artifacts, and observations of employees at an organization that is undergoing a rebranding initiative. The case study consisted of individual interview units which were layered into one organizational unit. Yin (2018) reported a single case study can provide the ability to study a complex social phenomenon in real-time.

There was a mix of qualitative and quantitative studies featured in the literature review, but nearly every study on organizational rebranding was based on a case study of one or more organizations. Creswell (2014) noted that a qualitative approach may be needed if the topic is new and the subject has not been addressed with a particular group of people, such as employees. The present study fills the gap in the literature by exploring the employees' views about rebranding initiatives and their perspectives of ways to engage them in achieving buy-in and alignment with the new brand.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Following a restatement of purpose and the research questions, an explanation for the selection of qualitative methodology and case study design is presented in this chapter. The proposed data collection strategy covers many subtopics, including sources of data collection, interviewing plans, participants and their selection process, sample size, how participants were invited, how the data remains confidential, and trustworthiness. The section on data analysis provides a preview of Chapter 4. A list of possible study limitations and planned remedies along with several delimitations to the study is offered, followed by a summary to close the chapter.

Research Method

The purpose of the study was to explore how employees view the rebranding process. An improved understanding of the employee viewpoint of a rebranding initiative contributes to building better overall rebrands for organizations and their stakeholders, including employees. The study discovered the employee perspective of a rebranding initiative through research of the following two questions:

1. How do employees describe a rebranding experience?
2. What are the employees’ perceptions of ways to engage them in achieving buy-in and alignment with the new brand?

By exploring these questions, the study contributes to the understanding of rebranding, an emerging area of research (Miller et al., 2014).

A quantitative study of a rebranding initiative might report the number of employees trained, what percentage of employees by different demographic criteria could correctly name the new organization tagline, and how many employees support the change. In contrast, this qualitative study captured and interpreted how the employees felt about the rebrand and the impressions that employees had of the rebranding initiative. This qualitative study gave employees a voice, something currently missing in the rebranding literature, as they shared their perspectives on the initiative and how they thought employees should be engaged in a rebranding initiative to achieve buy-in and alignment.

As a qualitative inquiry, the study focused on a relatively small sample of employee interviews, whereas a quantitative sample would typically have depended on a larger sample. The purposeful selection of a small group of employees allowed for an in-depth study on the issue of central importance: employees' perspectives of a rebranding initiative. In a quantitative study, the act of purposefully sampling participants would be considered bias, but in qualitative studies, it is the power of the study to collect thick, rich descriptions from participants that can offer a deep understanding of the questions under study (Patton, 2015).

Research Design

The research design is the type of inquiry within the qualitative methodology that sets the specific direction for procedures (Creswell, 2014). Researchers from different qualitative perspectives can study the same phenomenon, program, organization, or community, and may design very different studies, even if they all conduct observations and interviews and analyze documents (Patton, 2015). For example, a research study with a narrative design highlights the stories of an individual's life. Phenomenological research describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon unbounded by time and activity. Grounded theory aims to develop a theory, ethnography studies a group over an extended period, and case study allows for an in-depth analysis of a case while being bounded by time and activity.

The design strategy chosen for the present study was a case study of employees at a nonprofit private university in California that underwent a rebranding process. The reasons case study was selected are reviewed in this section.

Case study as a method was first named in 1870 by the dean of Harvard's law school to describe the professional training of lawyers (Thomas, 2015). Case study research has been around since recorded history began and has been used by other disciplines, such as the medical profession and academics. Contemporary case study research is said to have its eclectic qualitative origins in anthropology, history, psychology, and sociology. Most qualitative designs are aligned with specific philosophical positions that guide the research process and shape the perspective of the study; however, case study is considered "agnostic" in its approach and is not assigned to any particular methodological, ontological, epistemological, or methodological position (Mills, Harrison, Franklin, & Birks, 2017).

The criticism that case studies are not always generalizable eventually led to a philosophical division in research approaches: those supporting positivism and quantitative approaches and those aligned with qualitative methods embedded in constructivist and interpretivist paradigms (Mills et al., 2017). Contributing case study researchers come from diverse disciplines with different philosophical perspectives, and the result has been a variety of definitions and approaches, which can be confusing (Mills et al., 2017).

Fundamentally, there is no agreement about the criteria for the case study approach, which Yazan (2015) believed has hindered its full acceptance as a research strategy. According to Patton (2015), the term *case study* could mean either the process of analysis, the product of analysis, or both. Patton further explained that individuals, events, companies, and policies are all examples of single case studies. Merriam (1998) saw the case study as a method of inquiry to explore a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals applying a variety of data collection processes. Yin (2018) believed case study research was a method with strong philosophical underpinnings, which provided a framework for exploratory research in real-life settings. Stake (2000) offered an alternative view:

> Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied . . . could study it analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically or culturally, and by mixed methods—but we concentrate, at least for the time being, on the case. (p. 435)

Stake's (2000) definition was too broad according to Yin (2018) and implied every study of an entity would be a case study. The variety of approaches and definitions regarding a case offers researchers more latitude (Patton, 2015). Yazan (2015) suggested that the "multiplicity of approaches" (p. 150) and the range of perspectives forces novice researchers (like me) to define our own emerging identities as researchers based on our research decisions.

Exercising this freedom permitted by case study, I prefer an amalgamation of the ideas from Yin (2018), Merriam (1998), and Stake (2000). While I lean toward Yin's clear definition of a case study and practical guidelines about how to approach and report a case study, I do not believe qualitative research should be too structured. I like the flexibility in research design offered by Stake that allows researchers to make major changes even after they move from design to research by focusing on sharpening the research questions. Merriam approach was a combination of Stake and Yin in terms of case study design (Yazan, 2015). For example, Merriam believed purposeful sampling usually occurred before the data were gathered, but theoretical sampling is performed in conjunction with data collection. This suggestion differs from Yin's perspective that maintained that case study design preceded data collection, and Stake avoided any mention of when to start data collection, which Stake believed was in line with qualitative tradition (Yazan, 2015).

I took an eclectic approach afforded by case study design as I designed the study with Yin's (2018) guidelines in mind, but I stayed aligned with the research questions. I made a few minor adjustments along the way, per Stake (2000). For example, I originally proposed to use a qualitative data analysis software tool to code the data but later decided to use only manual coding. I realized the software tool was not going to perform as I initially planned so I substituted other means of analysis, such as keyword and word count analyses.

Case study designs have been used across many disciplines, particularly the social sciences, education, business, law, and health, to address a wide range of research questions and explore a broad scope of complex issues, mainly when human behavior and social interactions have been central to understanding topics of interest (Mills et al., 2017), as in rebranding. Consistent with other qualitative methods, the case study approach allows for in-depth understanding of the topic (Patton, 2015), and the purposeful setting is natural and encourages participants to offer more depth of perceptions and experiences (Curry, 2015). Overall, the case study approach has grown in sophistication and in reputation as an effective design to investigate and understand complex issues in real-world settings (Mills et al., 2017).

Qualitative case study as a research method is ideal when the research questions begin with “how” or “why” and when the focus of the study is a contemporary phenomenon or case (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) specifically suggested that case studies are an excellent fit for program evaluation, such as an organizational rebranding. Researchers often use case studies to evaluate the effectiveness of programs because the organization is a “bounded” system, bounded in time and place and thereby offers a good backdrop for a case study (Creswell, 2014). Miller and Merrilees (2013) went as far to state, “case studies are the hallmark research approach for corporate rebranding studies” (p. 174). My research questions focused on how employees view a rebranding initiative, a contemporary phenomenon. Given the good fit and strong endorsement, a case study was selected for the study design.

This was a single case study of the employees at one organization as this provided a rich and deep understanding of the viewpoint of employees about a rebranding initiative to answer the research questions. The primary focus of data collection was on how the individuals described the rebranding from their perspectives and what their suggestions were to achieve a successful rebranding initiative.

Awareness and timing played a role in the selection of the organization, a university that participated in the case study. Leadership was aware of my study from prior rebranding information I had provided to the university and was willing to allow the university employees to participate in the study. The organization's rebranding had been recently launched, and university employees had fresh perspectives to share.

To become more sustainable, the university leadership originally made a strategic decision to shift from traditional classroom and synchronous online settings to offering nearly all classes in an asynchronous modality. The rebranding was intended to reflect the move away from their traditional classroom offerings. University officials wanted to market the new approach that they believed offered more affordable and accessible options to a broader customer base. University officials revised this strategy just before the fieldwork. The revised strategy was to offer three modalities: (a) traditional classroom, (b) synchronous online as before, and (c) the asynchronous online as a third option, but not the only option.

The university recently had two rounds of layoffs, and staff was downsized to match decreased enrollments and the shift in strategy. As a result, employees were uncertain about the future. The university leadership was supportive of the study to better understand the employees' perspectives of the rebranding initiative within the context of a research study.

Data Collection

According to Yin (2018), data for case studies typically comes from interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, documentation, archival records, and physical artifacts. The data collection for this study came from all of these sources of evidence and was triangulated into themes as described in the Data Analysis section.

Sources of Data Collection

Chronologically, there was an in-person observation of the all-employee meeting where the new brand was the first step in the onsite data collection process. The study approach was intended to be a one-point-in-time data collection because all interviews were planned to take place around the same approximate time. Some data collection took place prior to the study as outlined below.

Interviews. The individual interviews and the focus group took place soon after the all-employee session, and the face-to-face interviews were held on the university campus, except for one phone interview and one off-site interview. All participants were given an opportunity to follow up with me with any questions or additional comments they may have had about the study.

The semi-structured individual interviews were 45-90 minutes each and were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were confidential, and pseudonyms were used in the study. There are some comments attributed to participants' organizational roles, such as the marketing head, president, or board member. There were some common questions used as a starting point for the interviews, and the depth of inquiry unfolded as responses provided opportunities to go deeper. The semi-structured approach provided freedom to pursue what emerged.

The interview questions are found in Appendix A and cover some fundamental questions about the employees' knowledge of the rebranding initiative, their impressions about the initiative, and their ideas of ways to engage employees to achieve buy-in and alignment. Also, I confirmed information associated with each employee's background, including experience, years of service, and level at the organization. IRB approval by

City University of Seattle was obtained before data collection, and the approval letter is provided in Appendix B.

Focus group. A focus group is a group interview (Patton, 2015). Krueger (2014) found focus groups to be beneficial because they create an environment where participants can tell their stories and spark others to do the same. The head of marketing selected nine employees, both faculty and staff, to participate in the focus group. The session lasted 90 minutes, took place in a university conference room, and was recorded and transcribed.

Patton (2015) purported that the quality of the interview is subject to the skills of the interviewer and offered the following description of how to do it effectively:

> Skilled interviewing is about asking a question well so that interviewees want to share their stories. An interview is an interaction, a relationship. Establishing rapport matters. Being nonjudgmental matters. Being authentic and trustworthy matters. Interview skills include asking genuinely open-ended questions; being clear so that the person being interviewed understands what is being asked; asking follow-up questions and probing, as appropriate for greater depth and detail; and making smooth transitions between sections of the interview or topics . . . and skilled interviewing involves the art of listening, and really hearing. (p. 427)

These skills impact the quality and meaningfulness of the responses (Patton, 2015). Having had years of experience as an interviewer and facilitator in a variety of internal and external settings, I was well prepared to conduct the interviews and to moderate the focus group.

Observations. Observations were made as a participant-observer at the all-employee meeting and the focus group. Observations of the meeting included descriptions of the participants, a reconstruction of dialogue and slides, and an account of the physical setting. Reflections were also noted such as my thoughts, prejudices, and ideas. I also made direct observations of relevant public information available on the organization's website for about six months preceding the fieldwork. Observations of the campus were made, such as co-branded signage of the university and its parent organization and campus decorations.

Other data sources. In addition to my field notes, I reviewed other documents, such as the agenda from the all-employee meeting and the organization's strategy report published on its website. Archival records reviewed included a headcount report and survey data about projected population growth in the community. Physical artifacts were collected such as photographic images of the campus, university marketing materials, and a copy of the Google calendar used for scheduling interviews. The internal information collected from the university was a rich source of case data that supplemented field observations and interviews, and provided a stimulus for interview questions with participants, as suggested by Patton (2015).

Participants

Selection. Thirteen employees of the university were selected for interviews from the population of more than 100 full-time faculty and staff members at the participating organization, and nine employees were selected as focus group members. One member of the board of trustees of the university's parent organization was also interviewed. The population size was verified by examination of a recent organization headcount report, an archival record received just before the fieldwork.

I sent consent form emails to each prospective participant inviting them to participate in the study. The emails were personalized for each candidate, and a generic copy of the email is found in Appendix C. All participants confirmed their willingness to participate by selecting an interview slot on the Google Docs calendar, by using a physical artifact provided in the introductory email, or by responding to the email or in person.

University marketing leadership assisted me in the selection of employees for the interviews. Participants deemed best able to answer the research questions were purposefully selected for the sample (Creswell, 2014). The sample was selected from both executive and non-executive employees at the organization. Executives included the university president. Additionally, for background purposes, I interviewed one member of the board of trustees of the university who was involved with the rebranding from a strategic-decision standpoint. The sample also included one employee who was unable to attend the fall assembly. This employee offered the unique perspective of being aware of the rebranding but was not exposed to the information that was shared at the official launch of the rebrand at the all-employee meeting.

Sample size. Patton (2015) stated, “There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p. 311) and that the sample size depends on what the researcher wants to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources. Boddy (2016) concurred that sample size is dependent upon the context of the study. The process of determining the size of the sample is to right size the group by taking a “Goldilocks” approach (Broglio, Connor, & Berry, 2014). Initially, the organization’s leaders and I believed that conducting 10 interviews would allow me to speak with a diverse group of employees representing all of the key departments within the organization; therefore, 10 employees were identified to be interviewed. The sample size was expanded to 13 employees based on onsite snowball sampling (Vogt & Haeffele, 2017).

The focus group consisted of an additional eight employees and one of the individual interviewees, the head of marketing, served in dual participant roles and was the ninth focus group member. Therefore, I met with 21 employees in total, representing approximately 20% of the employee population, plus one board member. Through participant-observation of the all-employee session, I had exposure to more than 100 organization employees.

Invitations. The City University of Seattle participant informed consent form served as the basis for the invitation. As previously mentioned, participants were invited by email, and a sample is provided in Appendix C. Participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any point without negative consequences. They were notified that their participation would be confidential, and their responses would be reported with pseudonyms. A Google Doc calendar link was sent to all participants as part of the invitation. The participants selected their interview time slot from the available slots on the calendar. Participants were able to contact me with any questions about the research.

A similar process was used to invite prospective participants to the focus group. I sent invitations, explaining that participation was voluntary, and the consent form was provided in the invitation. As a participant-observer, I convened the focus group meeting through access to email addresses of all invitees. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus groups as members of the group may later share information that took place in the group; however, the data I collected as the researcher will be held in confidence and any information in the study will be attributed by a generic “focus group member.”

Confidentiality

The information, including data and personal information during recruitment, data collection, dissemination of data and findings, and storage, has been treated with confidentiality. Participants were notified before the interview that their data would be kept secure and protected. The data are being stored according to the City University of Seattle requirement to secure data for five years and then to permanently destroy it. Research data were stored securely, including removing specific identifiers (e.g., contact information, any factors such as the role or title which would make it easy to identify the participants) and the use of pseudonyms was employed.

Those who have access to the data include the researcher and the researcher’s university chairman and committee. Additionally, I have taken the following actions to increase the level of confidentiality: (a) limited access to identifiable information, (b) securely stored data documents within locked locations, and (c) assigned security codes/encryption to computerized records.

Data Collection, Transformation, and Analysis

Merriam (1998) said case study data analysis is “the process of making sense out of the data . . . [that] involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning" (p. 178). To make sense of the data, they should be compared with the background provided by the literature (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

All interviews were recorded with both a smartphone and a tape recorder, except the phone interview, which was recorded with only a tape recorder. The audio files were transcribed at the end of each day using the Trint online application (Trint, 2018), which generated a Word document for each interview. Following completion of all interviews, the transcripts were combined into a single Word document. Line numbers were added to the document with the line-number function.

A manual review to compare the audio file with each line of the transcript was performed to correct the countless errors generated by the automated transcription by the online application. Before coding the corrected transcript, a chart was created to report the responses to each of the interview questions by the interviewee as an initial step to look for themes. The process to populate the chart increased my familiarity with the data and did offer some insights about possible themes.

Next, the corrected transcript was manually coded, line by line, using the comment function in Word to assign a preliminary code to relevant remarks made by interviewees. Once the document was completely coded with preliminary codes, the macro function was used in Word to sort the coded remarks by similar topics. Using the table function, the Word document was exported into Excel and sorted by various filter functions, such as sorting by the interviewee or by the preliminary code.

Once in Excel, the preliminary codes were grouped, and subthemes were assigned. Lastly, the sub-themes were grouped, and three major themes emerged and are presented in Chapter 4. The two research questions served as guidelines to develop codes, sub-themes, and major themes along with a comparison with rebranding theory found within the literature, especially the enablers and barriers research by Miller et al. (2014). Other codes were identified from the data as responses to the interview questions were analyzed and coded using inductive analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Patton, 2015). Relationships among themes were explored as were outliers—data that did not fit within developed themes. Outliers offered the possibility to improve internal and external validity as part of qualitative data analysis (Gibbert, Nair, & Weiss, 2014). The themes that emerged within the data collected, and the major findings that were discovered from a further review of the data within the themes, are reported in Chapter 4.

The process as outlined above reflects all six phases of Braun and Clarke's (2014) thematic analysis method. The phases include (a) familiarization with the data collected, (b) generation of preliminary codes, (c) a search for themes, (d) a review of themes, (e) definition of themes, and (f) generation of a report. Manual thematic analysis is a method, not a methodology, which means it is flexible and not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

The manual thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was supplemented by the review of other available information: organizational documents, Internet sites, and notes from my observation of organizational activities, including the focus group and all-employee session. Themes were established based on the convergence of data from multiple sources and the perspectives from multiple participants in a process described as triangulation (Creswell, 2014). The triangulated data are reported in comparative tables and narrative form aligned as responses to the research questions.

Manual coding of the initial Word document was supplemented by word count analysis and keyword analysis, and the results are provided in Chapter 4. The selected words were those words used by participants either frequently or in an unusual manner and were noted during multiple readings of the transcript. Results from these other methods added another dimension to the analysis of the data, and the themes generated by these analyses were compared to those from the manual thematic exercise and are reported in Chapter 4.

Trustworthiness

Johnson and Parry (2015) described trustworthiness in qualitative research as the credibility of the researcher, the systematic rigor within the research design, the applicability of the research methods, and the believability of the findings.

There were several techniques applied to add rigor and increase reliability and validity and, therefore, increase the trustworthiness of this qualitative study. As mentioned, I triangulated the data from multiple sources. In Chapter 4, thick, rich descriptions are used to report the findings. Additionally, I used member checking to determine the accuracy of the themes by sharing the completed study with one participant, who found the themes to be “clear, well-founded and important.” Additionally, individual transcripts were shared with two participants to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts. A clear audit trail has been provided.

It was critical to establish subjectivity and reflexivity in qualitative research processes. Subjectivity, referred to as bias by positivists, is the views, experiences, and positions researchers bring into research studies. Similar, but with distinct differences, reflexivity is the ongoing process of making personal reflections about our subjectivities.

Incorporating subjectivity and reflexivity means that it is improbable that different researchers might arrive at similar results, but this is a strength of qualitative research (Johnson & Parry, 2015).

The conversational nature of the interviews opened the possibility of me influencing the interviewees' responses, or their responses influencing my line of inquiry, as noted by Yin (2018). Being aware of this possibility made me sensitive to the potential threat of coloring the interview material, and I tried to avoid this by covering the core questions with all interviewees.

Subjectivity. I have personal experience leading several rebranding initiatives in a variety of industries. Additionally, while I have provided a complimentary compilation of rebranding research and made some recommendations to the participating university in the past, I have not conducted any paid consulting services for the organization, and I have never been a customer of, nor employed by, the proposed organization for the case study.

Reflexivity. I endeavored to be reflexive or self-aware throughout the study with what Patton (2015) described as an ongoing examination of "what I know and how I know it" (p. 70). Patton further explained that reflexivity recognizes that the perspective I bring as the researcher to qualitative inquiry provides part of the context for the findings.

Rigor. Rigor is needed to ensure the data can be trusted in a qualitative study. Creswell (2014) provided a list of techniques that can be used and reported during a qualitative study to increase validity, including triangulation, member checking, peer checking, audit trail, external auditor, clarification of the perceptions a researcher may bring, and rich, thick description.

Yin (2018) stated that the biggest concern about case study inquiry is potential lack of rigor. Yin advocated for the use of multiple sources of evidence to establish trustworthiness and credibility and to triangulate the data while searching for findings that converge from the different sources. Triangulation strengthens a qualitative study by adding deeper insight with comparisons of data from a variety of sources (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) suggested the process should be well documented with a strong audit trail, so the study can be easily replicated by future researchers.

The present study includes triangulation of multiple sources of data collected to confirm the findings. Yin (2018) stated triangulating the data can help to determine reliability, but Figure 3.1 illustrates how perceptions based on interviews, documentation review, validation from observations, and institutional analysis all combine through triangulation to support the findings.

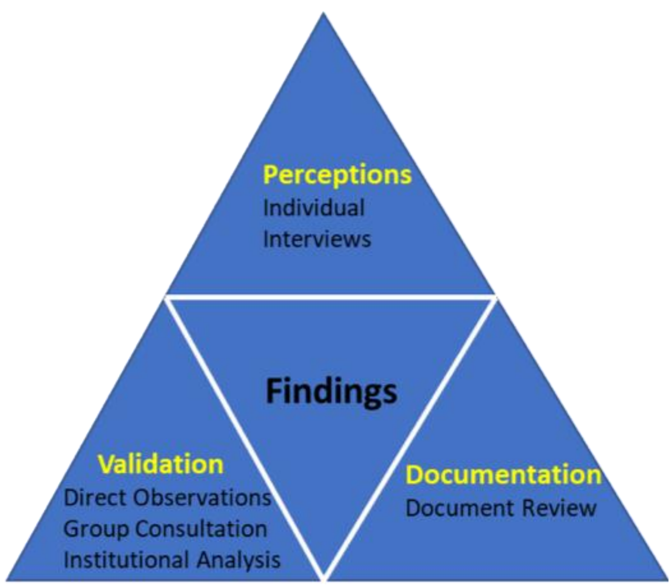

Figure 3.1. Triangulation of multiple sources of data. Adapted from “Case Study Triangulation,” by Case Study Triangulation, 2015. Copyright 2017 by Case Study Triangulation.

The clear roadmap for the study has been outlined in this chapter, and the triangulation of multiple sources of data was a crucial component of this study. The use of multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence, and having key informants review the draft case study, provided a test of construct validity and established the quality of the case study (Rowley, 2002).

As mentioned, I used thick, rich descriptions in Chapter 4 to convey the findings. I employed triangulation and member checking and left a clear audit trail. Triangulation combined individual interviews of the purposely selected employees with observations of the all-employee meeting, data from the focus group, notes from the review of documents, existing archival information, and physical artifacts. Several forms of member checking were used to help determine the accuracy of the findings. Leaving a clear trail so that another researcher could conduct a similar study increases the validity of the study (Creswell, 2014), even with the recognition that future researchers would provide different analyses and insights.

Limitations

There were some potential limitations, which are characteristics of case study design or qualitative methodology that may impact or influence my research. This section outlines some possible limitations and associated mitigations.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, rebranding initiatives often span long periods and may not have a definite ending to the process. As the present study took place in the midst of the rebranding, employee responses may have been different than if they were asked the same interview questions at a later time. This limitation, however, offers the organization an opportunity to make any necessary changes following a review of the results of the study.

Another potential limitation is that employees or executives may not have answered truthfully during interviews. Information obtained through interviews is subject both to the perceptions of the interviewee (Creswell, 2014) and the interpretation of the researcher (Lacy, 2017). This limitation was mitigated by the use of multiple sources of data collection, such as obtaining multiple perspectives along with observations and participant-observations and a review of internal and external documents, existing archival information, and physical artifacts. Additionally, university leadership may have selected employees who were not representative of the employee population; however, participant-observation of the all-employee meeting and the focus group offered insight into the perspective of the broader employee population for comparison.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus groups as members of the group may later share information from it. Participants were instructed not to share any sensitive information following the focus group. One or more participants in the focus group may try to dominate the discussion. As an experienced moderator, I was able to create an environment where participants trusted that their perspectives were genuinely valued and respected. I managed the discussion so that no one person dominated and that all participants contributed. Consistent with Yin’s (2018) description of a “good participant-observer” (p. 125), I was able to both take notes and raise questions about events from different perspectives.

As mentioned in the sample size section of Chapter 3, the marketing head was both an interviewee and a member of the focus group. This individual also directed the rebranding activities at the organization. As such, this participant already possessed more information about the rebranding initiative than the other focus group members. The marketing head successfully added context for fellow participants of the focus group.

Delimitations

This single case study of one private nonprofit higher educational organization based in California may be limited in its generalizability to other for-profits, nonprofits, or higher education organizations. While qualitative case studies have been criticized for not always being generalizable (Mills et al., 2017), an alternative view is that the narrow focus on one organization allows for a more in-depth and informative exploration of the phenomena (Yin, 2018).

The goal of qualitative research is not to create a generalizable study. Merriam (1998) suggested that the goal is instead to understand the phenomenon in depth, not to discover what is true for many. The logic and power in a qualitative study comes from an in-depth understanding derived from exploring information-rich cases (Patton, 2015).

Another related delimitation may be that the research questions in this study were broadly focused on the viewpoint of employees in general and not on employees from a particular type of organization (i.e., a university). As outlined in both Chapters 1 and 2, there is a gap in the rebranding literature which ignores the employee perspective and that gap is the priority of this study. Perhaps future studies will narrow the scope and consider the impact of the kind of organization.

Summary

Chapter 3 is intended to provide clear statements about the research strategy, and the specific plans used to collect and analyze the data. Chapter 3, together with Chapters 1 and 2, provides the groundwork to study employee viewpoints of a rebranding initiative. The current literature indicates that employees are the most significant factor in projecting an organization's brand (Stuart, 2012) and without employee buy-in, a rebranding is not likely to succeed. Yet, researchers have largely ignored the employee viewpoint of rebranding initiatives (Chad, 2016). This study is intended to fill that gap by offering some significant findings around the topic of rebranding as outlined in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The research findings are described in Chapter 4, beginning with a recap of the research questions that guided the study, followed by a review of the methodology, the analysis techniques, and an overview of the description the presentation of the findings. The findings are organized by three key themes that emerged from the coding process. One theme provides the context for the employee responses, and the remaining two themes feature information primarily provided by interviews with employees and are corroborated by other forms of evidence. The chapter is concluded with a summary of the three major findings and an overall chapter summary.

Research Questions

The problem is organizational rebrands can be expensive and risky and are conducted without any guarantee of success. Employees play a critical role in representing the brand of an organization to customers, and employee buy-in is vital to the success of a rebranding initiative. Yet, there is a lack of research about the employee viewpoint of rebranding initiatives. The specific objective of this study was to explore the employee perspective by seeking the answers to two research questions:

1. How do employees describe a rebranding experience?
2. What are the employees’ perceptions of ways to engage them in achieving buy-in and alignment with the new brand?

Methodology

Using a single-case study design, this was a qualitative study that explored the employee perspective of a rebranding initiative at a private university in California. The pseudonym of UNI was assigned to describe the organization.

The sample consisted of in-depth individual interviews with 13 employees, an interview with a board member of UNI's parent organization (aka, "Parent") and a group interview with nine employee participants. Interview participants were purposefully selected from the population of more than 100 UNI employees.

Other sources of evidence were collected to corroborate and augment evidence from the interviews and included documentation, direct observations and participant-observations, physical artifacts, and archival records. A manual thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was performed. The data were triangulated from all sources is reported in this chapter in narrative and tabular formats. Member checking of transcripts was employed as a test of trustworthiness (Johnson & Parry, 2015).

Keyword and word count analyses were also performed. Themes were established based on triangulation of the data from multiple sources, perspectives from multiple participants, and the multiple analyses, and are described next. A detailed description of the data collection and the analysis performed were provided in Chapter 3.

Overview of the Presentation of Findings

The case study was organized according to three descriptive themes that emerged from coding analysis of the interviews regarding the participants' experiences with the rebranding initiative. The themes generated were (a) reviewing the background of an organization offers context for a rebranding initiative (Context), (b) employees offer rich descriptions of their rebranding experiences (Descriptions), and (c) employees create meaningful suggestions for ways to engage them to achieve buy-in and alignment with a new brand (Suggestions).

The three descriptive themes were derived from 42 subthemes that emerged from 76 preliminary codes that resulted from the analysis of data from 14 individual interviews and a focus group of nine members, along with the documentation, observations, and review of physical artifacts and archival records. The themes and the list of their associated aspects from the coded transcripts are shown in the coding key found in Appendix D. Many of the subthemes are represented by subheadings within this chapter.

The themes are presented in this chapter in sequence with the descriptions of the context of the industry and the organization's business as the first section to set the stage. The second section features the participants' descriptions of the rebranding initiative. The third section presents the participants' suggestions for how organizations can achieve buy-in and alignment of employees in a rebranding initiative. Corroborating perspectives and other evidence are woven in throughout the chapter. Further thematic analysis of the three themes, as prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2014), resulted in three major findings which are outlined in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5.

This study was an exploration of the employee perspective, and employees of UNI told the story of their organization and its rebranding initiative under pseudonyms that were assigned to all participants and are used throughout the remainder of the study. A few pertinent quotes are attributed by job role.

Theme 1: Reviewing the Background of an Organization Offers Context for a Rebranding Initiative

As stated in the scope of the problem statement in Chapter 1, the research questions in this study were broadly focused on the viewpoint of employees in general, and not on the type of organization or industry. It was also outlined that the featured organization is a nonprofit organization from the higher education sector, which was deemed irrelevant to the findings of the study because the focus is on exploring the viewpoint of employees. These assumptions were driven by the gap in the rebranding literature that has ignored the employee perspective regardless of organization or industry, and exploring that gap was the priority of this study.

A review of the situation facing the employees in this single case study regarding their industry and the fundamentals of their particular business is provided to establish the context for their descriptions of their rebranding experiences, and for their suggestions for ways to achieve buy-in and alignment of employees in a rebranding initiative.

The Environment/The Higher Education Sector

Francis Wayland, President of Brown University, commented on the status of education in 1850:

> Our colleges are not filled because we do not furnish the education desired by the people. We have produced an article for which demand is diminishing. We sell it at less than cost, and the deficiency is made up by charity. We give it away, and the demand still diminishes. (as cited in Dennis, 2017, p. 9)

Cost has become the first and most important factor students/customers face in weighing the value of universities (Allaire, 2018). The rising cost of education is worsened by a diminishing pool of well-paying jobs, resulting in underemployed graduates who face massive student loan debt (Allaire, 2018). Recent industry trends in higher education for U.S. universities include decreased enrollment overall, continued increase in online course enrollment, and an increase in competency-based degree programs (Dennis, 2017). More collaborations between for-profit online organizations and nonprofit universities, growing concerns about the sustainability of tuition discounting, expansion of tuition-free programs for low-income students by states and cities, and limits on the number of out-of-state students, including international students, are also trends (Dennis, 2017). Guilbault (2018) added that higher education institutions are experiencing problems with retention rates, increased competition, and increased expenses in acquiring new students.

I observed that industry trends were the topic of a speech given by a senior executive from UNI's Parent at UNI's annual all-employee meeting, the fall assembly. As keynote speaker, he highlighted five trends driving change in the industry: (a) changing demographics with adult learners as a new norm; (b) technology, including virtual and artificial intelligence and machine learning; (c) economic challenges from the knowledge economy and globalization; (d) perception of value versus cost by students, including the impact of student loan debt; and (e) competition with new models emerging all the time such as online learning, boot camps, and certificates.

Similarly, the president of UNI described the industry environment in the following terms at the annual all-employee meeting:

> The world is changing very dynamically. It is a dynamic time for higher education. So even when we would be on a path to success, the winds of change blow. Something could happen in the environment that would make our steady progress some way shape or form different.

Simone, a study participant, suggested, "We cannot avoid change to higher education, and UNI needs to figure out how to be a leader, rather than just going under because we didn't get on board."

The Organization/UNI

Declining enrollment was cited as an issue at the organizational level for UNI. One focus group member reported, "In the six years that I've been here, we have half the student base that we did when I started."

Nancy a participant, described the board of trustees of UNI as:

> very numbers-driven. I think the board has put [the president] in some kind of box, checking the numbers all the time, a fear-based position. I had a brief conversation with him yesterday, and he said, "Your program is growing. Your numbers are good." And I'm like, "Yeah, I am pleased." We grew 26% over the last year when most of the programs are in the negative.

A document review of UNI's most recent environmental scan highlighted forecasted demographic trends and program perceptions. In particular, the scan predicted substantial increases in population over the next few years within UNI's geographic area with the largest increases expected in the Hispanic population. Additionally, it was stated that students consider the programs offered as the primary driver to select UNI, with psychology programs rated the highest by students and alumni (UNI 2020 Strategic Plan, 2019-a).

The organization's values. Nathan, a focus group member, offered this: "UNI is an institution that is committed to social justice and diversity and has a mission to work with underserved communities and work with folks who are adult learners." The university summarized its vision, mission, and values as:

> The vision is to be the learning environment of choice for those seeking a transformative and life-enhancing educational experience. The mission is to provide access to high-quality, innovative educational opportunities that integrate theory and life experience. We inspire personal, professional, and academic growth and advance the well-being of our diverse local and global communities. This mission is built upon our core values which are: accessibility, quality and innovation, transformative growth, diversity and global world view. (UNI, 2019-b, para. 1-3)

During fieldwork, I noticed posters, physical artifacts, of famous heroes of social justice in the campus hallways and offices. An image of Rosa Parks (see Figure 4.1) was on the wall outside the room where most of the interviews took place and served as a constant reminder of UNI's mission.

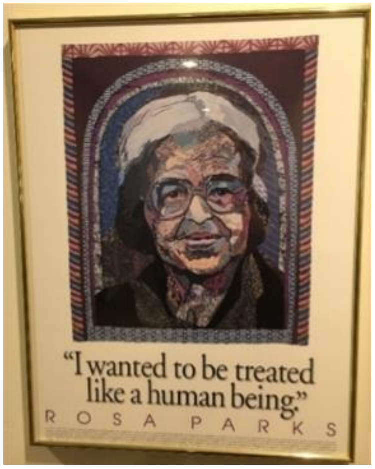

Figure 4.1. Rosa Parks. Adapted from "Fabric Portrait of Rosa Parks," by J. Spacks, 2016. Researcher photo taken in 2018 of a Poster at UNI. Copyright 2016 by Judy Spacks.

A focus group member described the basis for the founding of the university: "What this university was founded on, was to make education accessible to a population that would not necessarily have access to it, which was the working adult."

Paul, the president and a participant, recalled that the founder and his wife promoted the "value of lifelong learning" when they established the university more than 50 years ago. The president stated, "My focus is to assure that the values of the university, what we do in giving back, stays together and helps align this and then it stays together because that value is so precious here."

Nancy talked about UNI's commitment to service learning as a "spirit of innovation, teaching students to light the way, the passion for all of that."

One focus group member explained how the recent addition of a new affordable, accessible, asynchronous, online option (known as *FC* or *the new platform*) is consistent with UNI's value of providing education that represents social justice:

> The idea is that we're looking more at how the university can serve a population that may be an underserved population or bring the education to a demographic group that could not have afforded the financial cost or financial barriers or time barriers or whatever it is. That's where the shift is right now. Essentially, we're opening it up to different groups by expanding our idea of what it means to provide some kind of social justice equity in education.

Another focus group member added:

> If this [social justice/service learning] is still a core value, it is diminished. It doesn't have the same force that it used to. I think it is good we are giving a testament to the original, but the value of it is much lower than it once was . . . completely reshaped and redefined.

Another focus group member commented:

> When you first asked us, "what are your values? What do you stand for?" we just were silent and wondered . . . hmmm, service learning? We just cut that. We're not offering that class anymore. It is still ingrained, but it looks like it has been cut from the vision.

Another focus group member added, "Well, it's been removed from the catalog." Others joined in and verbalized their agreement with the uncertainty about current organization values raised by the removal of service learning from the curriculum.

The organization's cultural considerations. Several employees expressed their views of the new platform in terms of the culture and morale of the organization. One focus group member referenced the closing of community counseling centers that the university had staffed with psychology students for decades:

> From the whispers I hear, there is a lot of confusion. The counseling centers, that's a big part of our [culture]. That was a big part of social justice. To have that part removed and many other things that happened in the last two years really does impact kind of the psyche of the people here. There's confusion, you can feel it, especially in the last two years. I mean I can just feel the energy and the emotion and everything just kind of like "where do we fit in now?" What does this mean, how does this affect me on a daily basis or the people that are left?

> Jose, a participant, explained, "We've gone through 'reorg' for two years straight."

Barbara talked about the impact of the ongoing reorganization in the sense of belonging to an institution:

> You can have good relationships with your colleagues; you can love what you do, but then you also are proud of what your institution does and what it's doing for the students, what the institution is and what it stands for. And I think with all the changes happening in the institution over the past couple of years, that was really, really affected. And it really affected all the employees.

Helen a participant reported, "Morale here, and I've been here for 10 years now, and it's just lower than I've seen. And I'm not even putting it on the [two recent] layoffs." Ken, a participant, added, "Turnover of staff . . . faculty are still hanging on, but it's the negativity . . . in the halls . . . is palpable."

Nancy described a family culture experienced by the core faculty at UNI:

> They don't leave. They don't tend to leave their jobs. They are here to stay a long time, you know, like me. I would say most of the faculty like working here. I

> mean they have their gripes, you know, but they get they get to teach their passion. And also, there's a bit of a family feeling. I have great relationships with them and mutual respect.

The organization's vision. Nancy associated UNI's vision with the flame which is the primary element of UNI's iconic logo that has been around for more than 50 years:

> If we're going to change the world, if that's our direction, to light the path, where does the inspiration for that come from if you don't have some guiding principle that's above and beyond the human level? Which is what the flame is. The flame is an archetype—a symbol that is bigger than us and outlasts us. It's something we can be reoriented by. It's a vision, and you need a vision. You need a vision, or else you're just reduced to the mundane.

When I asked if she thought the organization had a clear vision, Nancy responded, "I think the vision is very 'horizontal.' [UNI] doesn't have a vertical vision you know. I mean but it could. I think maybe it's out there." Separately, Ken mentioned that, "[the flame in the logo] moves you forward, and this adds clarity."

Jose also used the flame from the logo as part of his explanation of how the values, vision, and strategy are aligned:

> That flame is a light that we want to continue to bring forward into the world, and I think our programs meet a lot of those needs with mental health being a big one. You know our programs are relevant to lead to good jobs and so carrying those core values forward but having a clear message and a clear vision and a strategy on how to work how do we achieve that.

The president expressed this sentiment:

> There is a lot where I have to walk a fine line in terms of presenting a vision of the future, which I sincerely believe in as we go forward, but I'm not able to fully reassure everybody because it's such a dynamic change.

Helen described one impact from the lack of vision:

> Of course, I'll do whatever [the dean] wants me to do. I think he's a wonderful boss, but I don't think he even knows where this vision is going; and if there's not a vision, how much energy and effort am I going to put in?

The organization's strategy. The president explained how UNI's strategy has been evolving:

> We had [an all-employee] meeting last February, and we first started talking about it [a shift towards more online programs with a new asynchronous offering]. And here we are today. Well, throughout that process, there has been all of that discussion and [the strategy] changed and morphed constantly. I like how you explained that the values are sustainable in all of this, but we went through a process that at one time we said we were going to take all of our courses and put them on the new platform. That was the plan. And then of course, [the plan] shifted and we're not going to do that anymore. And that's just happened recently.

The president spoke more about the fluidity of the strategy:

> Sometimes every week, every month, or every board meeting, there's a new strategy trying to figure out what the right direction is. There's [sic] weekend conversations with board members and the chancellor in trying to do that. So, my hope was that I would show people an opportunity, to tell them where we are

> now, which is yes, we've got three things, and maybe that wasn't clear. But there is a "three-legged stool." So that's where we are going now.

The three legs or modalities offered include some programs that will continue in the traditional classroom style, some programs that will continue to be delivered in a synchronous online format (i.e., Blackboard), and the newly launched asynchronous platform that features an unlimited number of classes for one fixed annual price. The president added, "It's hard to figure out how that's going to fit together. I mean, it is hard to figure." A focus group member mentioned the fluidity of the strategy over the past year:

> At times, it was "everything is going." And then it was like, "nothing is going." And then it was like we are getting rid of Blackboard. It was like everything was possible. And then as it finally worked itself out [for three modalities]. There was a group of us charged with let's say "this is the strategy" and everybody agreed, the administration agreed that this was the strategy . . . and we really want to make sure people get the word.

Several focus group members explained that those leaders held a somewhat informal employee meeting one week before the fall assembly to explain that the strategy is a three-legged stool and not a shift to only the new FC modality. The president confirmed the strategy was only recently finalized for UNI.

Millie, a study participant, explained how the strategy to invest in more online technology should be viewed within the context of the business results:

> If we were doing really well here, people would have this idea that it's [the new platform] just an expansion, but given declining enrollment, the environment

> makes it definitely more threatening—this kind of announcement when there's been a reduction [the recent layoffs], and then there's an announcement that we're buying this big thing [the new technology platform] (The new platform was the primary driver for an acquisition of a small fully online university made by the Parent a few months earlier.).

Jose described the benefit to the new strategy:

> [Where] we've gotten in trouble in the past is trying to do a little bit of everything. Now, we've kind of pulled back, and we are focused on our core strengths with psychology and law. The new platform is a little bit outside of that, but at the same time, it is I think, a good strategic move because it's offering that lower price point. So it's helping us differentiate and address other needs.

Millie wondered aloud about the impact of the new modality: "Are we leading brand-wise with what we teach? Or are we leading brand-wise with how we teach?"

Despite the recent informal employee meeting, many study participants were concerned about the shift in strategy to expand the online offering. Derrick, another participant, mentioned that employees wondered "all the time" if the strategy is to put 100% of the courses online. Simone elaborated on this concern:

> I think that there's [sic] a lot of people, a lot of my colleagues, are very worried and very frightened, and I think, perceive this kind of existential fear. That is their way of being, especially for the psychology programs, their way of being in the academic world with this very high-touch, very intimate way of teaching. And [they believe] it's no longer welcome at UNI, and that it's going away in the near future. I don't think that's true. I think it's a "both/and." But that's my feeling

> about it. I don't have their fears. I feel like what this new platform allows us to do is expand what we do. It's not about less; it's about more. It enables us to reach students that we might not have been able to reach before and to be of service in a way that we haven't been of service before.

Millie said:

> The reality is that we have to be competitive. We have to change. And the program is struggling, and I want the program to live. So, I make compromises. Let's move the masters online because that's where the students are.

Ken expressed how the future of the entire organization depends on the new strategy:

> I think from a business standpoint, if it does not become the new core, then we will end up shutting the doors. I mean, because of enrollment. That's the question I can see, we all can see. Will we be one of many groups that will walk away from the total brick and mortar classroom?

The organization's products (educational programs). The president shared with employees at the fall assembly that UNI has

> a 90% retention rate, quarter-over-quarter. That's outstanding. We have shown and proven we have ways for our students to make a difference. They enjoy learning here, and also, we have a loan default rate of 5%, which is unheard of. Anything below 10% is outstanding, so our students learn, they make a difference, and they go on to be successful.

Derrick described the alignment between UNI's programs and its values: "Our programs were made for people that wanted to make an impact in their own community somehow." Nathan stated:

> The biggest advertisement for our current graduate programs, are our students. Almost invariably when I do new student interviews or open houses, they say, "That's why I came here, because my therapist graduated from here. She said it would be a good place for me to study."

Nathan further commented on the role of employees in recruiting students to UNI: "not only are [employees] critical in communicating the brand, they are walking models of the brand. And as a consequence, they bring in students because of the brand."

Barbara spoke to the quality of the programs, "I don't think that there's any doubt that the quality of the education and the service that we offer here is excellent." However, Ken was concerned about the impact of the new asynchronous option on the quality of the overall program:

> The grave concern, the great concern is quality. One of the things that I think the traditional faculty and staff are holding onto dearly is that when you say "rebranding," it isn't necessarily changing what we already do but adding to what we already do via the new platform, a new channel, a new modality, a new way to take that knowledge, in addition to the core product that will stay the same. And when I say "quality," I mean what we consider to be a quality educational opportunity.

Carol, another participant, summarized the addition of the new program like this: "It's like a menu, and you have new options. Because you already have a restaurant with delivery—and now takeout."

The organization's customers (students). One focus group member remarked: "I think the student has stayed somewhat the same. It's the adult learner, underserved learner. That's always been a UNI centerpiece." Simone reiterated this sentiment:

> You know, I run into people who got their degrees at UNI 20 years ago, and they still talk about it with like this longingness of wanting to be back in that community of learning because they loved being at UNI. People love going here. I went here. I have a masters from UNI myself, and it's an amazing, amazing place. No one wants to lose that.

Another focus group member suggested, however, that the core customer was changing:

> I just look at the students that I work with, student workers, the graduate students, the alumni, and when you sit here and talk about this what comes to mind is, "I came to this school for this and that but no longer." They came for the mom and pop, customized, warm and friendly, face-to-face, intimate. You know, more personalized type of experience, and now it's become this corporate, cutthroat, black-and-white situation.

Helen described UNI's current undergraduate student body like this: "They're just not good students. We're putting bodies in the seats, but those bodies probably shouldn't be where they're at. Now, if you have a heartbeat and a checkbook, you're in." One focus group member shared this experience:

> There was one discussion at the [fall assembly] meeting the other day that was kind of interesting in terms of, are these students, who are in the traditional program and in the new asynchronous program, are they the same types of

> students? Would these students who finish their undergraduates on the new platform be adequately prepared for our graduate-level programs? I'm just stating the concern on some people's part. To me, that says there is a perception that there is a difference between the two populations—that they are not homogeneous. Not one big happy family.

The organization's structure. **S**everal study participants pointed out to me that there are two presidents at UNI, and it is very confusing. This was confirmed by a review of UNI's organization chart and has been the case since the acquisition. The UNI president confirmed there seems to be confusion in having two presidents: "Yeah, I've had that a lot; even from my assistant. But, he [the online president] reports to me." Ken commented in his interview:

> One (president) came from [the acquisition], and he was president of that university. He, of course, didn't want to change his title. But clearly the reporting structure is a little out of whack, and there's a little bit of fighting and a lot of secrecy, and I know that's a recipe for disaster. Indeed, and I hate to feel it, but I can tell you it isn't lost on anyone in institution regardless of title and position. Clearly, you can't have all of these cooks in the kitchen.

When asked if the two presidents can coexist Ken continued:

> It's looking worse day by day from internal stuff that's happening. I do know if they can't figure out a unified clear and effective message that can be talked down and communicated across the university community. I have become less optimistic.

UNI is one of several universities in the Parent's overall affiliate system. One of the first things one notices when driving up to UNI's campus is the co-branding, which prominently features both the Parent organization and UNI logos on all signage. The same was true for banners lining the path from the parking lot to the fall assembly offsite location. Once inside the all-employee session, as a participant observer, I noticed that all of the visiting employees from the Parent sat together at one table and did not interact with UNI employees other than with UNI's president. While reading over the day's agenda, which was dominated by speakers from the Parent and a demonstration of the new platform, the UNI employee sitting next to me leaned over and whispered, "They're f*ing trying to colonize us!" When back on UNI's campus, several employees complained during both formal and informal meetings with me that the Parent was starting to "take over" the building. They noted this as members of the Parent organization recently began to occupy some of the classroom space.

A negative description of the Parent was not expressed by all of the participants. Derrick explained:

> We've been part of the Parent organization for a decade and I know at the beginning portion it was very hands off. We did not communicate. And so there was this really strict "hands off" thing. And there was a lack of cooperation and communication. And then at some point, it flipped.

The president also commented on this:

> Before I got here, no one had ever met the other side. You weren't allowed to talk. And I had in my first year [as president] a 40-person exchange. I just tell people, "come up here." I make people who started in the [Parent affiliate system]

> come here because otherwise they just think of it as “this little satellite” or something and there is a soul and heart. My job is to do that.

There were other inconsistent descriptions about the Parent. For example, Derrick mentioned that his marketing organization reported into UNI’s president but without a dotted line into the Parent’s marketing organization. This lack of a formal reporting relationship with the Parent was unlike other UNI functional areas, such as finance and human resources who operated within a matrix organization structure with dual reporting. However, the president believed marketing also had a matrix reporting structure and was surprised to learn it did not. The marketing head also pointed out that at least one of the other Parent affiliates had much broader marketing responsibilities than UNI’s marketing team, who was reliant on the Parent’s team for most external marketing services.

It was also observed and confirmed by several participants that no group was performing internal communications for UNI although the marketing head said he was technically responsible for it. He went on to say, “The communication internally I think has been a weak spot.”

The organization’s overall communication approach. The president confirmed there is no communication strategy at UNI. As far as channels to communicate, it was observed that there is typically one formal all-employee meeting annually.

Jose reported that most communication comes through email and staff meetings: “I just think that people don’t use [the intranet]. I think that there’s a lot of information there, but they don’t go to it.” UNI had both a faculty senate and a staff senate. Helen said “the faculty senate is much more powerful than the staff senate. But we think we’re a lot more powerful than we are.”

Millie described the workforce at UNI this way: “Our labor pool is mostly adjuncts. [The administration] has put it on the chair to communicate [with the adjuncts]. We’re supposed to tell them, but it doesn’t trickle down in the same way.” Millie also offered an opinion of how UNI’s leaders feel about feedback: “Shared governance’ means it’s my job at the top to inform you, maybe get feedback from you, maybe, but I don’t have to take your feedback. And that was made very, very clear to us.”

Barbara emphasized UNI’s reliance on email as a primary communication channel: “Maybe there was one [an official rebranding announcement], and I missed it, but I haven’t seen anything in my email—talking about the branding and what it means.”

The organization’s leadership approach. Employees talked about the leadership style they experienced at UNI. Derrick described UNI as being part of an “authoritative kind of organization” [the overall Parent organization], which results in “people. . . standing around wondering what’s happening and they’re waiting on a higher authority.”

Millie questioned whether leadership really wanted any feedback from employees:

> Do you really want my opinion? Like, what’s the value of my opinion? Can my opinion influence people? Is it safe enough to have an opinion? Is me having an opinion that’s different from your opinion going to hurt me in any way? It’s not just the current administration. This was the same three years ago. This is what was considered “shared governance.” So how do we speak to each other? How open are you to my input? How safe is it for me to give you input? And what does that look like?

Helen shared this concern to describe how she feels about the leadership style:

> I've been here 10 years. I feel is that there's these decisions that are being made, which are above my pay grade, which I get; but I can't be a good soldier and do what I do, if I don't have all the information or if I'm being told one thing and something else is happening.

When Ken was asked if he believed UNI's president thinks he is communicating enough information, Ken responded, "Probably. It's a humongous blind spot. It's always been like that." He indicated it wasn't limited to rebranding communications. He also confirmed that leadership believes what they're doing (concerning communication) is adequate: "And I can tell you that it is not. And I've tried, you know, in my role." When asked how leaders respond when pushed to increase communications, Ken reported: "'Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I already know.' Then, there's a level by which I'm just not going to be disobedient."

Nathan used similar language to describe the lack of communication on the part of leadership:

> There is probably somewhat of a blind spot. But it's also a fear that what they are going to hear is not consistent with what they are going to do. And so, I think that influences behavior and then there are the personality characteristics.

Barbara mentioned the impact of office location on the ease of communication:

> There's people who have different styles of communication. I don't know if it is the same way in other schools, but ever since [our group leader] moved to these offices [pointing in the direction of the nearby executive office hallway], it's harder for me to communicate with her. And you know communication is not

going to happen as often. It's interesting how the hierarchy can sometimes be blind.

The president apologized for being part of the communication issues but also mentioned an opportunity for employees:

> In the whole world of the world, I could be a better communicator. But people always will say, "Well how come I don't know about this? How come I don't know about that? How come I've never met these people [Parent employees] who are suddenly this week moving in down the hall?" And I mean that's the opportunity to meet our colleagues.

Jose explained that he looks for solutions to help employees understand leadership:

> I do this; I try to explain some of these things. Even though some things are unexplainable. I'm a part of that executive team. So, I do feel that in a way I'm part of the problem, and I have to find ways to be a part of the solution. Even yesterday I was thinking, what are ways, the small ways, that I could help to just encourage or uplift the staff? I see part of my role is helping to connect those dots and speak for [the president], but they want to hear from him. It doesn't always help for me to just clarify. I try to give them a perspective of his job and kind of where he's coming from. The amount of hard decisions that he's had to make over the last two years. Unpopular decisions, but necessary decisions to keep us afloat. And so, in helping them realize beyond their specific role, these are the largest challenges that we face. I do try to provide that perspective. These are some of the gains that we've made; these are key wins that we've had over the last 2 years.

Millie offered her perspective of the president and his communications:

> I think the president has been very transparent with me specifically when he's like, "How am I going to translate what you're asking for? Because they [the board] have a point of view too." So perhaps if we understood their point of view. The challenge is, this board thinks like business people. Faculty doesn't like that. I'm a business person who happens to teach, not a career academic. So, when I hear "the board wants to see the numbers" or "the board wants to set a goal" or "the board has a financial profile," that doesn't nauseate me, that's just real to me. So when I come back, and I tell my faculty that "we need full classrooms and we need to make sure that our growth numbers are up, and we need to make sure student evaluations are high. Like, this is the criteria that they're asking for. We need to nail that in order to have credibility in these conversations." So how we process, how we speak to each other, how we understand the limitations. Doesn't mean we're going to be happy about it.

Millie gave some additional credit to leadership communications:

> In fairness to UNI; they told us a lot of stuff. They really have, and they'd been kind of clear about it—like we need students. We can't live in the old paradigm. We need to embrace the new paradigm.

When asked, "Where's the breakdown in leadership communications?" She answered, "A lot of people think there's been mixed messages. I think it's a lack of trust."

The organization's decision to rebrand. During the interview, the president shared some background about what prompted UNI to rebrand itself:

> It came out of this frustration with a flyer . . . that made the university look like a mattress sale. It's hysterical. So immediately we were trying to find a way to do something that just took *that* away. We had focus groups, and an ad agency, and marketing and staff to come together and, I'm not going to say this right, but it was about a new message about change essentially.

The rebranding initiative by UNI began about a year ago and culminated recently with the development and launch of a new website that featured videos of the faculty which were co-created with input from employees and customers.

About nine months ago, a different rebranding initiative led by the Parent began in parallel. The marketing department of the Parent created a new tagline for UNI, "It's About Time," that was launched at the same time as UNI's new website. The tagline was designed to promote the new online modality (FC) acquired by the Parent that featured a flat annual tuition rate and asynchronous programs. The tagline implied that FC was a more flexible option regarding a customer's time; it was a more accessible and affordable education opportunity. The board of trustees for the Parent approved the new tagline around the time of the acquisition of the new platform.

The Parent's acquisition and new tagline development was a separate rebranding initiative from the one led by UNI's marketing team. Neither the marketing team at UNI who was leading UNI's initial rebranding initiative, nor other employees at UNI, were aware of the second initiative (by the Parent) until a few days before the scheduled launch of the new website. According to Derrick:

> We were running down one path and then we had a very last minute "about face" change in direction that that was placed on us. This is something that was placed

> on me by the head of marketing at the Parent organization and that I literally don't have any choice in the matter.

The result was that the second initiative, with the new tagline promoting (only) the new platform, became the "front door" to the entire UNI organization as the new landing page for the university. The second (Parent) version (a new organization tagline and an advertisement for FC) was laid on top of the first (UNI's) version (the new website that featured multiple modalities and with content that had been developed with employee and customer input). Millie summed up this conflict:

> There's a dissonance between "don't worry" and "you're okay, we're not going to change your program." And if you scroll through our website, it's three full-screen-scrolls worth to get to the regular programming at UNI. You've got "UNI Online" as the gate. So, for those of us in traditional programming at UNI, I don't know how to interpret that.

Regarding leadership's approach to the rebranding, Derrick provided this perspective:

> It was coming down from chancellor and board level. You need to make this change [to the home page], to match this tagline, despite the fact it's only FC. When they forced the takeover on the home page, it essentially alienated all of the other programs. Yeah, I mean our home page right now is like very, very FC-centric. I can imagine how difficult it would be for the rest of the staff and faculty to get on board with any of these things when me, the head of marketing and communications, is sometimes feeling like I'm not involved in these decisions that are happening—because they happen to us. I mean when the chancellor goes and decides that this is where you guys are going, then, it's really difficult to get

> on board with that, especially when I'm not even hearing it from the chancellor. I'm hearing it from somebody from the Parent marketing organization which is supposed to be our agency. And so you know our agency, instead of working with us to discover and figure out what these things are supposed to be. Yeah, it gets personal.

The president confirmed the "takeover" approach displayed by the parent organization:

> And then FC was coming, and we're getting ready to launch [UNI's version of the rebrand], and then they [Parent] just went in. Like a takeover from a system point of view. The Parent with FC. It was FC goes first. We had an "It's About Time" conversation, and that has to be forefront because no one's ever heard of it before. We're going to drive them here. They've got to understand it. This is what's going to drive what we need—new enrollments.

Summary of Theme 1: Reviewing the Background of an Organization Offers Context for a Rebranding initiative

Many challenges faced UNI as it rebranded. The industry changed dynamically and, according to employees, UNI had faced years of declining enrollments culminating in layoffs and increased involvement from the Parent organization. The values and vision were no longer clear to employees and the quality and type of customer had changed. There was an acquisition that provided a new online platform, an important new delivery channel, but the implications threw UNI's strategy into a state of flux.

There had been little communication with employees who wondered about the future of the organization. Conflicting messages were sent by the two rebranding initiatives underway at UNI. One initiative had been forced on UNI by the Parent. Figure 4.2 illustrates the sequence of the critical developments described by employees that impacted rebranding over the past year.

The direction taken by the Parent and UNI leadership is shown above the timeline, and actions taken by the UNI organization are displayed below the line. It is clear that two different rebranding initiatives began before the recent strategic change in FC direction and prior to the internal communication of both the strategy and the rebranding to employees. Observation of this sequence of events is a significant finding and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

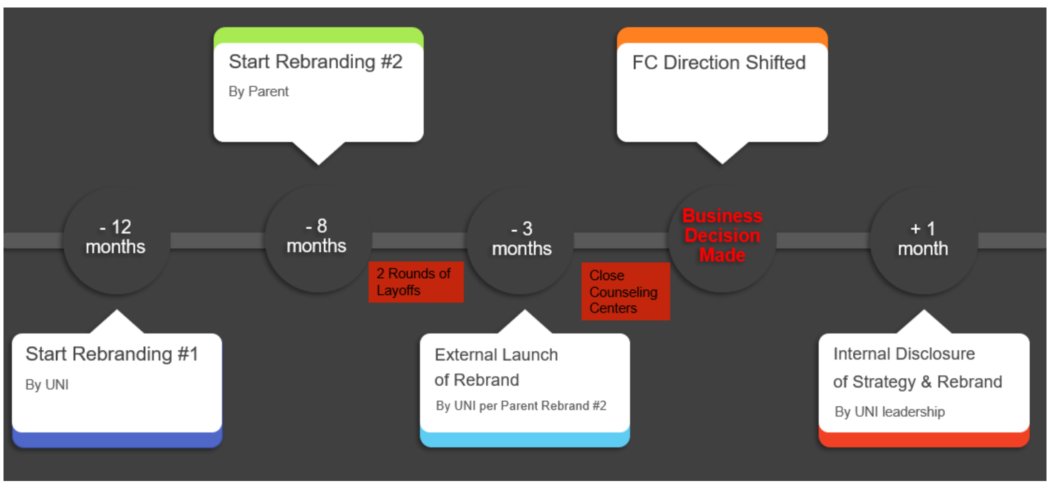

Figure 4.2. UNI's rebranding and business decision timeline.

The context theme was based on employee descriptions and provided important insights into the organization regarding its values, culture, vision, strategy, products, customers, organization structure, overall communication and leadership approaches, and decision to rebrand.

Millie recapped the context of the present situation from the employee viewpoint: "I mean stuff has happened in a short amount of time. People got laid off; counseling centers closed, some of the programs kind of got a little lost in the shuffle. It’s like, what’s next?”

Theme 2: Employees Offer Rich Descriptions of Their Rebranding Experiences

One of the two primary research questions was to explore how employees describe a rebranding experience. In the Theme 1, Context Section, some context was provided for the employees’ state of mind as they described the organization. Much of the data for the study were collected by asking interviewees to describe different facets of their rebranding experience. Their combined responses to the interview questions provide the basis of analysis to answer the first research question. The interviews were triangulated with other forms of data collection, including documentation, direct and participant observations, and review of artifacts and archival records.

A Discrepancy in the Definition of the Rebranding

I noted a lack of consensus among the interviewees on how to define the scope of the rebranding at UNI and when it began. It was not clear to employees if the term *rebranding* described only the UNI’s rebranding related to the website project led by UNI’s marketing team in collaboration with faculty, the scope of the rebranding included the new tagline and advertising created by the Parent’s marketing team featuring FC, or both. Some interviewees were unaware a rebranding was even underway, and some understood something was happening but were unfamiliar with the term rebranding.

When asked outright if the interviewees were aware of a rebranding initiative, five responded *yes*, three answered *no,* and six were unsure how to respond. Simone shared this perspective:

> I was aware of the new taglines on the website and advertisements and so forth. I had not heard it described as quote, rebranding, until I'm talking with you. I think describing it as a rebranding makes it sound like it's part of the problem in the sense that it implies we're having a "complete makeover" and we're not, you know. We're adding capacity and adding new ways of doing things. But that doesn't mean we're losing all the old ways of doing things.

One focus group member said:

> We've always been going through some level of significant repositioning. It feels like it's been a constant. I feel like it's always been evolving as the market has been shifting—as things have been changing. We've let go of different programs. We've added certain bits. I just feel like we're always rebranding the university—all the time. That's just kind of how we operate. So, I think it's kind of more of a part of the environment than like a state that we've gone through.

There was some discussion about whether or not the rebranding included a name change or not. One focus group member stated:

> I think the [organization] name has changed a little bit. I mean we're still "UNI," but now we're also "an affiliate of the Parent System." So that tends to be encouraged to be put out there lately, but that change took place 10 years ago already.

Another group member commented:

> This year we have "UNI Online powered by FC" [the name of the new platform]. So that is different. It's not just "UNI." It's almost like "Fried Chicken by KFC" –

> "UNI Online, powered by FC." That's different. Got a different ring to it. It's got a different sound to it. Especially when I heard it on the radio.

Jose attempted to explain how there could be a discrepancy about the rebranding: "We launched a new website. We launched FC but there's never been communication to say we are rebranding, right? But we are rebranding."

Employees' Initial Reactions

This subsection provides a quick overview of the initial reactions made by the interviewees when asked to describe their rebranding experience as displayed in Table 4.1. Many of the employees expressed their uncertainty about the rebranding initiative, some reacted only to the tagline, and some called for clarity of the strategy and direction.

Table 4.1

Initial Reactions by Employees to the Rebranding Initiative

Interviewee	Response
Derrick	“It’s very jarring.”
Nancy	“‘It’s About Time.’ That’s a bad tagline. I mean it really, it doesn’t say. Well you know it didn’t say anything about UNI or anything. A lot of things are about time. It’s horrible actually.”
Nathan	“Based on what I know, I would describe the UNI rebranding initiative as ‘lacking.’ Lacking in terms of linking to the past, lack of clarity as to what is meant by the phrase ‘Now’s the Time.’”
Millie	“Well, if you want the employee perspective, it’s disarming, right? It’s like. So what is this? ‘It’s About Time.’”
Helen	“Didn’t know about it but felt like: I’ll do whatever my boss tells me to do. But it’s getting to a point where it’s, OK, am I doing this with the sword of Damocles hanging over my head?”
Ken	“I have had a lot more information than 90% of the institution and even I didn’t make that jump to a rebranding message until the website and the social media. And I don’t know that I put that whole thing together until just now. I mean the tagline.”
Barbara	“No, I haven’t [seen any rebranding]. Maybe there was one, I missed it, but I haven’t seen anything in my e-mail talking about the branding and what it means.”
Muriel	“Well, I don’t know very much about the rebranding initiative, so I don’t think that I can’t give an answer.”
Simone	“I think there just more clarity is needed on what the vision is for how this new platform will fit in with the UNI mission and vision. And how it is an add-on rather than a substitution.”
Paul	“Multifaceted.”
Shirley	“I would describe it as an introduction of a new model both in terms of payment, a subscription-based payment plan, but a different online, an asynchronous online platform.”
Jose	“What I thought was the rebrand was creating new ways to learn and offering new ways to learn, FC being one of them, but maintaining a strong emphasis on our existing online programs through Blackboard which I would call ‘high touch.’”
Rose	“To me it’s inclusive [the website project].”
Carol	“Well from my perspective I would describe it as somewhat ‘exciting’ and especially with the new online programs and how that plays into it.”

Employees' Description of Their Feelings

Helen tried to describe how employees were feeling about the rebranding:

> So, there is that fear factor that's there, uncertainty, not feeling that there is communication—lots of issues around the rebranding. People would feel like, "Well this hasn't been told to us. Therefore, can we trust it?" And there's a history of mistrust, I think.

Carol also used the term *fear* in her description: "I think maybe some of the concern comes from a place of fear of what does this mean?"

Helen talked about how she felt after the fall assembly: "I didn't feel unified at the end. I wasn't inspired either. I actually felt pushed out." In contrast, the president described one goal of the fall assembly this way: "I wanted everyone to feel like they knew about FC."

Focus group members discussed their feelings about the fall assembly, with one commenting, "I found that in our meeting on Monday, still after the presentations, we were looking around thinking, why are they telling us about FC? I thought our programs weren't going to be on it and are they now?" Another member added, "I had at least five people come up to me about that" Then, other members spoke up as well, "[The agenda] was focused on the FC training. So then, I'm like, oh, *now* we are. It was unnerving." The other members agreed, and all spoke at once, "Like OK, now we're going to be part of the support staff of supporting the whole platform? . . . Right. And before, the original was that it was going to be 100% separate and our function was not. And it felt like it was creeping in. OK. What does that mean?" Examination of the agenda document for the assembly showed about half of the agenda was focused on FC. Helen presented her feedback:

> Unfortunately, human nature, if we don't have an explanation, we're going to make one up that's going to make sense to us, usually based on past performance. And so in our group, our faculty is pretty good with coming up with doomsday scenarios, very creative, very creative—some of the things that come out. So that's what it's like, and then it starts this panic.

A focus group member commented on how the lack of communication impacts employees:

> There is a dissonance or a disconnect that I think is really challenging for a lot of people to navigate . . . because they don't know their place, they don't know how we're communicating as a whole anymore. I am just going to keep saying it; there's confusion.

Later in the session, the same individual elaborated that point:

> On a day-to-day basis, people are confused. They're struggling because it hasn't been communicated well. I hope that is seen and felt because *that* to me is the secret sauce—it's these hearts. And that heart is having a hard time right now (murmurs of confirmations made by the other interviewees) because they don't know their place. Because before, when I first started, it was drive and it was passion, and everybody was bonded together through this vision and this passion to serve these working adults and to serve these students who had chosen us. I think that there's a struggle that's very real. Like I said before, it's palpable

> because there's such amazing passion and we can convey that in our videos and in our stories and in the way we word things on the website. But it [the rebranding about the new platform] hasn't been communicated well. So where do people fit in? How do they be full in their hearts and in their passion when they're feeling nervous, and they're feeling unsettled, and they're in that fight-or-flight mode?

Barbara expressed some personal feelings:

> It's been difficult to go through the rebranding and through all the changes at the same time because we lost a lot of colleagues. And so, it's been costly on a very emotional level for the institution. And I don't think that's being addressed. Things change all the time; it's not a problem. *Change* is not a problem. It's part of life. I am saying that we could have done more to talk about it. Because when you talk about it, it becomes lighter and it creates a space for everybody to be on the same page about how we feel. I think the communication here and the disconnect with what's happening and what the plans are, it's pretty evident. And so, we could be a lot more excited [about the rebranding], but then we find out there's stuff.

Employees' Description of the Rebranding Messages

The participants had wide-ranging descriptions of what the primary changes were to the brand, what the new tagline means and what they thought of the new tagline that was created by the Parent marketing team.

The main change to the rebrand. Employees described the primary change they noticed to the brand. Ken said, "The main change for me to the brand is online education at a less cost, more affordable. Definitely more accessible." Simone also described the primary change to UNI's brand in terms of the new platform:

> There is an emphasis on accessibility that's now there. Accessibility not just in terms of for people with disabilities, but in terms of finances, in terms of dismantling the ivory tower and making higher education accessible to everybody regardless of income and regardless of position in life.

Jose concurred, adding, "I thought the rebrand was creating new ways to learn and offering new ways to learn, FC being one of them, but maintaining a strong emphasis on our existing online programs through Blackboard which I would call 'high touch.'"

Derrick spoke about the visual changes made by the Parent's ads for the new tagline: "The new look is totally different. So, this is like big faces, all demographics, all different." Millie also called out the new look as one of the main changes to UNI's brand:

> I was there for some of the filming days. I think that actors that they used for the site look more like our students and that there is a look and feel that is a more relaxed student. That's different from before. They [the Parent] used models before, but it was kind of like an Orange County model with a blazer and shell top, heels—didn't match what the students here are like. Didn't look like our students and didn't really look like our university. It looked like maybe what the Parent thinks the Parent looks like, but it didn't necessarily look like what our students look like. So, you look at the students now. Like my students are. I'm the only person in the room without a tattoo. Right? So, some of the "students" [models] have tattoos—it just looks more like who we attract.

Carol seemed to agree adding, “The [new] look definitely feels more kind of speaking to the younger generation.”

Rose, a participant, spoke of the functionality of the new website when she described the main change to the brand:

> I think it was more of the website that we talked about—to make it much more flexible, especially with the number of changes that we were as an organization we were going through—that there’s a flexibility of being able to make these changes very quickly than for us to wade through a process before we can actually do something. So that to me was what made much more sense. It was this flexibility to update.

Muriel was the only study participant to have missed the fall assembly, commenting:

> Well, I don’t know very much about the rebranding initiative, so I don’t think that I can give an answer. I could clearly see that the new platform FC is taking a seat at the table. I knew that they would have to do something in regard to rebranding. However, I didn’t know what was going to take place. You know, because they have to introduce it.

What the new “It’s About Time” tagline means. The interviewees were asked to explain the intended meaning of the tagline introduced by the Parent.

Jose responded, “My understanding is obviously emphasis on the increased flexibility of time and being able to complete your program much faster—‘on demand’ is kind of the thing that they’ve used.” The president commented:

> It's sort of a double entendre. It means "it's about time" that we have this flexible format that you can go forward and at that price point that it is offered and it's about the other part it, it's about your time, so your time to be able to go forward with your education.

Shirley, the board member, had a similar response:

> I think it the beauty of it is that it can mean several things. As a student, it's about first "it's about time" that you could start a program if you've been thinking about it. It's also about *your* time. How would you like to spend? If you would like to do this, we'll call it the "All You Can Eat Plan," you can do that. And if that's a more effective way for you to use your time, you can take advantage of that. And you aren't restricted to a prescribed time as you would be in a traditional format or even a traditional online format where you have certain times that you have to check in or do some things in-step or keeping pace with the rest of your class. It's a more flexible use of time. (emphasis added)

Barbara mentioned how the advertising affected her interpretation of the slogan:

> There's a particular ad [by the Parent] I was very intrigued by. It says something like, "Hey, earn your degree the same way you stream TV." And that's really intriguing. As for me, when I see "It's About Time," that's exactly what I think. Like, "don't delay your education further—you can start now." That's I think a selling point. You can get your education for cheap, which is great. I mean it speaks to the accessibility part, the affordability. But at the same time, it's like you can do it fast, right? I'm not an expert, or I don't know too much about online, but it seems to be a lot harder in many ways—like more rigorous. So

> that's why I find a little bit of a clash between what it actually is and then what it is said to be. What the selling point is. It's supposed to be easy. Education is supposed to be easy? Education is becoming easy as easy as turning on your TV? But it is actually not. It is much more difficult, and it's actually not for everybody because some people may not be able to do it online. And it's not a modality that they can adapt to or that they can learn. I've been in higher ed for a long time—and education is not easy or convenient.

Nathan, who was not familiar with the tagline prior to the interview, concluded that communication to employees about the tagline was important:

> I don't see how "It's About Time" could be communicated by employees without them understanding what it is about time that is important. It then gives folks something to tell others about. We know we have these options to take courses on your own time. And we are expanding our vision of social justice by creating a product that is priced so that it makes it more affordable to a broader number of folks. Because the delivery system allows more people to take the same courses at the same time.

Opinions of the "It's About Time" tagline. In the preceding subsections, interviewees described the main change to UNI's brand and what the new tagline was intended to mean. They were also asked for their opinion of the tagline that was developed in isolation by the Parent for UNI to use. Beyond the board member and president, not one employee interviewed expressed a positive opinion about the tagline.

Nancy was concerned it didn't differentiate UNI. She said, "That's a bad tagline. I mean it really, it doesn't say, well, you know, it didn't say anything about UNI or anything. A lot of things are about time. It's horrible actually." Nathan expressed a similar concern and incorrectly recalled the wording of the tagline: "'Now's the Time,' what does that link to? It's ubiquitous. It doesn't, it doesn't capture. I'm not sure what audience a phrase like that captures."

Nancy was not clear the tagline referred to the new platform, saying, "The message 'It's About Time' isn't telling very well the modality. I didn't even know that's what that meant." Millie was worried that speeding up the time for education sends the wrong message:

> For us [her program], the time, the three-year model, for the type of students we attract. Even though it's long, it's purposeful. If the new branding is about shrinking time, what does that mean to me? What does that mean to our students? What does that mean to the integrity of our program? What does that mean to how comfortable I should be? What does that mean to what I'm going to be asked to do moving forward?

I asked nearly all the interviewees a "what if" question. What if the tagline was changed by one word? What if the tagline was "It's *Your* Time" instead of "It's About Time?" There was unanimous support for this concept. Rose responded, "Oh, it is a really good change. We should think about doing that." Nathan agreed the substitution of one word made the tagline have an emotional appeal to the customer, the adult learner: "You're absolutely correct. I like your modification." Millie replied with this perspective:

> If you said to me "It's Your Time," what does "your" mean to you? I could wrap my head around that. There's a passion in it . . . mmm, that's a good one. It works for me. I think it's brilliant. I think it's beautiful. So I love "It's Your Time"

> because it's for the returning adult student [the target customer]. Yes. It's your choice; it's your time. It's your time! Do you want to come only at night? Do you want to sit at home in your pajamas? The whole "your" means it's your decision basically. Do you want to serve the community in a different way?

Historical references made to previous taglines. Many interviewees referenced previous UNI taglines when describing the current rebranding initiative and new tagline. One focus group member shared, "Our branding just prior was 'When Did You Know?' which worked on the 'Education for Change' model." I observed this outdated tagline on some of the slides at the fall assembly presentations, which indicated the new tagline had not yet been consistently applied internally. Derrick also mentioned "Education for Change":

> That was about putting out front that our education, our programs, were made for people that wanted to make an impact in their community somehow. Prior to that it was "Transforming Lives and Changing the World." We moved away from the Transforming Lives" tagline because nobody wants to be changed. They want to effect positive change, but they don't want to be changed. It's scary to go to a place, and the professor wants to change you.

The president made a similar comment, saying, "We took away the 'transformation' part about it because the thing about transformation is—who wants to be transformed, right?" Nancy provided a different perspective:

> I think this idea of lighting the flame (from UNI's logo). . . . In a way, we're saying, "light the flame of your spirit, of your education, of your soul," to go "light the flame of the world." There used to be a line "Transforming Lives,

> Changing the World." I mean it was true. I'm going back in history, and there were two that were very similar that both worked for me better because something has to happen for the student. It has a little bit of that vertical and horizontal. Employees generated them. That's why we're here. That's why we work here. Yeah. And I think everybody could get behind something like that too.

The Website

There was broad concern expressed by the interviewees about the new tagline and featuring only the new platform, FC, on the home page of the new website as it represented just one modality and only a few UNI programs. Meanwhile, there was complete agreement across all interviewees about the need to revamp the previous website and that there was value added by new content, which included "bios" or videos that highlighted the faculty and new visuals that better reflect the customer. Other than the addition of the new tagline on the new home page by the Parent, which was part of the second rebranding initiative, the remainder of the new website project was a cornerstone of the original rebranding initiative. This initiative was led by UNI's marketing team in collaboration with faculty and staff and was supported by marketing research. The president commented on the website:

> Our website before, it was horrible. It hadn't been changed since 2005. It had thousands of pages, and you couldn't find anything. Now, we've interviewed people—we have these lovely videos. They've done such a wonderful job, and there's a lot of them. We came in, we did all of this stuff, we got to here, and we had the same flame that we had, and we're ready to go. We're getting ready to

> launch. And then they just went in—the parent with FC. But I think, at the end of the day, it's so much better than it ever was. We have faculty.

Barbara spoke to the website project saying:

> The whole [website] project was to make it more unique because we were basically doing what Parent was doing and that was, I guess, taking away from the uniqueness of UNI and our programs. And I know that we were asked to provide input. There were meetings like a focus group [where] we were asked to give ideas of content that could go on the website just to get a sense of how to communicate what we do and the services we offer. [However], it's very heavy online right now I think when you look at the website. And there's a lot more that we offer and then you know you may be discouraging other students that don't like online. Yes, that's where we're going, but you're losing some customers.

One focus group member pointed this out:

> There is a positive side to [the rebranding initiatives], which was—the whole process of having the new website was pretty inclusive. You all [UNI marketing] reached out to everybody and said "we've used for 10 years—stock art 'businessy' people who have no personality. And guess what? We get to be ourselves; we're going to feature faculty, we're going to talk about our programs more." We all got to come in and make videos and have pictures taken. And to me, that's *a* step, not all the steps, to say we're all in this place and we are going to show people that. And at the same time, it's allowing us to have a better sense

> of what we do and where it's going. And you know that was pretty inclusive. (emphasis added)

Derrick, from his role in marketing, tried to clarify for focus group members how the website can serve to reconcile the two rebranding initiatives:

> You can kind of look at this (pointing at the Parent's ad for FC on the home page) more as a "campaign," whereas with the rest of the website is intended to last. And it's intended to work with our guiding principles and have inclusiveness of actual real people which our previous website did not speak to that at all. I think the whole [original] site had three images on it, and it had over 4,000 pages, which is a ridiculous number of pages. And so, the goal was to be, to really showcase who we are and what we are as an institute; and the front page of the website ends up being very much an advertisement.

What Success Looks Like

Employees were also asked to describe a successful rebranding outcome. Ken discussed:

> Certainly, a successful outcome would be to reach more students and prospective students. I mean increased enrollment. I think a successful outcome would be that the faculty and the staff embrace change and be excited about various different additions to the core and are seeing that OK it's not a scary thing. Yeah, just where you'd look back in a few years and say "boy, what a great decision."

When asked if the rebranding has been successful so far, Ken said, "no, not yet," but he was "hopeful" it will be at some point. When asked what it would take to close the gap, he responded, "Communication from the top with a clear rationale for what's happening and why. A clear structure for who is making decisions and why those decisions are being made . . . that's understandable to everyone." Jose had a similar response:

> Hmmm...outcome. It would be definitely I guess a clear message, a clear vision or direction for both students and staff. I think something that we wrestle with is, faculty to administration, is hanging on to the glory days of the past of what we used to be about.

The board member spoke to what success would look like:

> In terms of success, I would say there are projections going in, and it's successful if you meet your projections [in terms of] enrollment and/or revenue, which is based on enrollment. So, either way, you want to measure it. They're tied to a budget or a forecast, and I think there are certain markers like when two and three years out what the expectations are. You achieve certain numbers, right? And so, success is, you hit them, or exceed.

Summary of Theme 2: Employees Offer Rich Descriptions of Their Rebranding Experiences

Employees had different definitions of the scope of the rebranding and offered their initial impressions of the initiative along with some deeper feelings. They outlined the main changes to the UNI brand, including what the new tagline means and their opinion about it, and they made historical references to previous UNI taglines. The organization's website was a focal point of the employee's description of the rebranding, and the portion of the rebranding that was conducted in collaboration with faculty was considered to be positive. Interviewees mentioned increased enrollment as a key indicator of the success of a rebranding initiative.

In reflection, those interviewees that were most familiar with the new modality, FC, were most supportive of it, including the president, the board member, and participants from enrollment or other areas that were already supporting the new platform or developing courses for FC. In contrast, those interviewees with little or no current exposure to FC expressed the most negative responses to it.

It was observed that all but one of the employees that were invited to participate in the study accepted the invitation. The lone employee that declined had a travel conflict. In reflection, all participants seemed comfortable in sharing their descriptions of the organization and the rebranding initiative(s), in addition to their suggestions which are outlined in the following section.

Theme 3: Employees Create Meaningful Suggestions for Ways to Engage Them to Achieve Buy-in and Alignment with a New Brand

This section features the suggestions offered by the employees for how to achieve buy-in and alignment in a rebranding initiative. Millie recapped the importance of engaging employees with the new brand: “I think for [the rebranding] to work you need buy-in at all levels and [it] has to include the faculty and the staff. And, again, I’m worried that there is so much suspicion.”

Communication

Participants unanimously called out communication as a key way to engage employees to achieve buy-in and alignment. Helen said, “I think that will be one of the things, to just have more clear, concise, trustworthy communication. And that would be nice to just walk the talk right there." One focus group member simply responded that the answer to developing buy-in was communication:

> Very basic communication. I think that the meeting that [three employee leaders] had with both faculty and staff to really help understand some of these changes and to put everything in perspective was very helpful. A lot more of that, I think, on regular basis, would be really beneficial.

Derrick agreed saying, "The meeting last week did pretty good effort to lay out new pillars. 'These are the three pillars, the modality that we're utilizing and there is going to be possibility of moving between these ultimately. But right now, these are the pillars: FC, traditional classroom, traditional online.'" Derrick went on to talk about alignment in terms of moving forward:

> I think there definitely needs to be some better communication. I think the last year or two there's been to a degree a lack of communication, and some of that has been necessary, but I think now we're at a point where things have to be open and transparent to be able to move forward.

Ken also mentioned communication as a way to align employees.

> Communication. It's bringing your employees along with you on the road to decision making. And so, of course, clearly you can't have all these cooks in the kitchen [referring to the two presidents]. But when decisions *have* been made [explain] *why* they've been made. Communicate those appropriately, quickly and walk the rationale behind it. I think everybody assumes good intentions when it's communicated. If I tell you something that might hurt, you feel better having heard it from me *directly* than finding out by email. And that's another thing

> [without communication], you'll make up your own version which would not be based on fact. And then that starts the whole downgrading of the culture. The whole feeling that I'm not in a place that values me enough to consider my feelings, my thoughts even to consider. Give me your rationale for changing my work environment! (emphasis added)

Carol suggested more frequent communications may improve alignment and commented: "I know they do that once a year, we do a year in review. We see the graphs and see how we did compared to previous years. But maybe something quarterly—more like that."

Helen mentioned the downside of not communicating: "When you have a lack of information, I've the kind of mind, I will slice and dice and think of every imaginable, possible outcome, typically the ones that are least favorable."

Communicating a vision. Jose suggested communicating a clear vision may be a way to align employees:

> To offer that direction or a vision of kind of where we're at, helping them understand that we know that it's a tough spot right now and that we have been tightening up things. But this is the hope, the light, for the future.

A focus group member echoed this sentiment: "We also need a clear vision of where we are going." Another participant called for leadership to communicate a vision:

> I don't think it's been well communicated where we are going. In the beginning, I mentioned that I assumed we are going through these changes, but it hasn't been communicated to me directly. I'm just reading through the lines, and I think not just me, but others in the institution are going through the same thing. You know,

> we see that we are going someplace, but it hasn't been effectively communicated to all—that that is the pathway we are taking – that we are choosing to take.

Ken commented, "There's been no real communication about here we are, here's where we're going to, and how we're going to get there."

Communicating success stories. Carol suggested that by communicating success stories it could help align employees:

> I think the biggest thing at this time is definitely communicating with all levels of how it's working. Because I think there are pieces that are already working. . . . I know the goal of this is to help broaden our customer base and diversify that and to, I guess, give some form of reassurance that this is working and how this is working. Then, to kind of help get everyone on board and feel like there that we're accomplishing something good from us. (personal communication, November 8, 2018)

One focus group member also spoke to the benefits of sharing success stories:

> I know we have significantly reduced our numbers, but we have programs that are doing very, very well. And we haven't taken advantage of the programs that are really healthy. I don't think we have taken advantage of the fact that the bread and butter of the core of UNI is still here, minus the counseling centers. The rest of it, is still, for the most part, looks like it's healthy. So, I know that [the reduction] was done in a very strategic fashion and I think there's a way to show that really the lifeline has really sustained.

Provide an Opportunity for Input

Jose discussed the idea of providing an opportunity for input: “From the executive level, we need to spend more time understanding the employees, the staff, of kind of where they are at what the challenges are and hear them out.” The board member added this perspective.

> Well, I think getting [employees] involved, and I think asking from the get-go. I think it’s important especially that customer-facing employees are involved. Because if you want to be successful, it’s the ones who are in touch with the students who have their finger on the pulse. And it’s really important, and I think it’s just a different perspective. I think if you get with the people that have involvement with students, and getting some sense from them about, “Hey, we’re going to do this. What do you think from the student perspective or from your viewpoint on the students?” I just think it’s important if it’s going to be successful. Otherwise, there could be a lot of misses along the way if people are sitting back who have that day-to-day contact with the students.

Barbara added:

> When change happens, it creates opportunities for us to talk about it, to even acknowledge it. It’s an essential part of therapy, you know? Like psychoanalysis and everything. And we teach about that, and our faculty has experts on that. And so, when that doesn’t happen for the employees and also for the students, then it creates a bubble, an emotional bubble, and then it starts having people start getting disconnected with the institution. And I think that goes along with the rebranding.

Leadership Should Provide Context

Simone called for leadership to provide context for dedicating so much time to FC at the fall assembly and how it fits into the overall rebranding:

> I don't know that anyone told everyone why we were there. You know, if someone had gotten up yesterday morning at the beginning and said, "Hello. Most of you will never actually work on this platform. And most of you will not teach on that platform or deal with students who are working on the subject because it's being operated in a separate way. However, this is essential to our university's rebranding effort, and you are all are part of that. And guess what, here's what's the research shows. How important you are to our success with the rebranding and to our future talent or recruiting issues. So, we need you to understand what's going on, and we want to make sure that you all are part of this thing going forward." No one said that. I just said it, and it took me only 30 seconds.

Derrick also thought that providing some context could go a long way to align employees:

> One thing that we hear, that comes into my office a lot, is that people are asking questions of our campus-based staff about FC because it's a great deal! And they want to know about it. Heck, maybe they want to get another degree. So, this thing [FC], "That's really a great deal. How do I take advantage of it?" And nobody here knew any answers. And so there is this problem where nobody knew anything, and I think that there wasn't the framing on Monday saying, "We know people were asking this, and this [session] is going to give you those answers." And I think that it would have gone a long way, just to add that one sentence at

> the beginning of it: "We're going to talk about FC for the next 4 hours because lots of questions are coming up and we need to make sure that you have the answers."

A focus group member mentioned the background research that supported why the decision [for the new platform, FC] was made as a way to achieve buy-in:

> It makes sense for us to go into this [asynchronous online] market. There's a huge demand for it. People are asking for this. For us to be in a position to do this is a huge advantage. I think if the market research been presented, I think it would have settled the room to have a little bit more belief.

Another focus group member concurred, saying, "For me, it would have been extremely valuable to be presented the market research. This is why it makes sense for UNI to expand online and rebrand."

Millie expressed that she could support FC as part of her program if the option was presented to her in the right context. She stressed it is important how she is approached about something new. For example, if leadership had said (in her words):

> "Hey Millie, you've got a lot of power here, and we have this new tool. Can you use this tool? Is there a way to use this tool? I'm not going to force you, but could you?" If somebody wanted to have that conversation with me, my answer would have been "yes." So yeah, I could teach law and ethics that way because eventually, they're going to have to pass an online exam for law and ethics. Why wouldn't I teach the ethics on FC? And I could share that with my sister department, and we could just "can" it, right? I'm cool with that. But nobody

> asked me that question. But if they did, I'm not resistant. It's just not the whole curriculum, right?

Barbara also mentioned how messages are delivered is important to alignment: "Beyond an e-mail, some kind of interpersonal, heart-to-heart update of 'I appreciate you guys. I see where you're at. It's been a hard road.' More acknowledging where they're at, about where it's been and where you're at."

Simone suggested how one presenter who was introduced at the fall assembly was incorrect, and the topic missed the mark in terms of being too narrowly focused versus being big picture and inspirational. She noted:

> It's just the way it was presented. The wrong context. [Faculty member] got up there, she's a UNI faculty member, but was introduced as a Parent presenter. She's sitting on the faculty senate of UNI! She is a fully interactive, responsible, core faculty member at UNI. She's in charge of the [general education] courses on FC, and they're going through this amazing renovation. She's got a whole list of courses. I think it's very exciting to see. They're upgrading. They want to make sure that everything is up to UNI standards. There's a clear recognition that, in addition to our other traditions, we have always maintained a very high level of rigor and sort of academic integrity. And they're redoing all these courses to ensure that it's all aligned with that tradition and with that heritage and that's not what came out. Instead, it was again nuts and bolts and logistics.

Simone further suggested that this presentation was a missed opportunity in terms of developing employee alignment with FC. She summarized by calling for leadership to provide clarity, context, and continuity to improve alignment:

> I think just more clarity needed on what the vision is and for how this new platform will fit in with the UNI mission and vision. And how it is an add-on rather than a substitution. I'm talking about from the perspective of the faculty and the staff.

Continuity

The president told a story about the founder when he introduced the rebranding at the fall assembly. When asked for ways to align employees to achieve buy-in and alignment with the rebranding, the president replied:

> The university has a very strong history and it certainly wasn't the first time I told that history story. And then new people came up and said, "Oh, I really like that." So, when I tell that story, we are reminded of our roots. So, trying to align and tie everything we do, even the FC piece, back to our mission—adult learners. And that notion that [the founders] were talking about "lifelong learning" in 1964. It's important to this legacy and this notion of continuity.

Engagement

Rose discussed the importance of working together in rebranding initiatives:

> We're not rowing in the same direction. Maybe. But we are all there. . . . This orchestra isn't quite coming together, but we're all there. We're playing our own little piece. It's just not coming into harmony yet. We need to get the whole symphony playing the same correct way.

Derrick talked about buy-in in terms of the website successes and failures:

> So, every single page on the site we've had staff or faculty buy-in on that. Yes, there's been a lot. We do a lot of meetings; we do a lot of interaction. It was a lot of our time. It does really well when we do, and when we don't, they do not do so well.

This comment aligns with what was reported in Chapter 2. Researchers suggested organizations cannot merely force a rebranding on employees if they want to be successful (Spear, 2015). Employees are an important part of an organization's brand, and they have to understand what the brand stands for, so they can "live the brand" (Melewar & Alwi, 2015). Muriel described her perspective of buy-in:

> I think part of buy-in is involvement and not that autocratic-type of involvement where it's superficial and talking at the troops. That you're using what I'm bringing to the table. Maybe not everything—you deciphering between what is valuable and what's not. But not just throwing it out. (The interviewee imitated a voice.) "Yeah, yeah, yeah we're going to use. Good idea, good idea." But then you see none of the ideas of the employees, none of their concerns being brought to the front.

She used the term autocratic again in her comment:

> It can never be autocratic where it's just forcing down the throats. When employees feel that they're involved in whatever aspect, then that's where buy-in takes place, because they feel like they have a part in it. And so if I have a part in it, and I clearly understand what's going on, that gives me the support that I need.

Nathan made this suggestion in regard to buy-in:

> I think the principal way to engage employees is really literally to have informal and formal gatherings to really just talk. This is not a large entity. So, the more you communicate, the more people sort of embrace the complexity and you know that sort of energy associated with being part of a team wanting UNI to be successful. This is simple stuff. . . . The other piece is to get a lot of very bright people to not only communicate, but also be receptive to hearing how what you communicate could be enhanced or modified based on the feedback. So, for this [small] size organization, that really is an asset.

The board member talked about the importance of employee engagement for alignment:

> Aside from [external] marketing, I am not aware of the extent to which [employees] have been involved. I think they should be just because in any change it's very important to get employee buy-in for the change to be successful. And this is not superficial. We're not just changing a tagline; there's more to it than that. Behaviors have to change to align. Right? And so, yes, it's important. But no, I do not know how deep into the organization involvement went.

When asked if engagement, concerning brand training, could be used as a measurable key performance indicator (KPI), the board member responded: "That's possible. Yeah, I think even just a preliminary survey. I think an outreach for information from them to get input before anything is set in concrete is important." Barbara talked about the impact of lack of engagement:

> I could be more excited about the rebranding if there had been space, more space for us to talk about these changes [the closure of UNI's counseling centers] and

> now like acknowledge and grieve, have our moment of grief, let it go. And begin that process.

She went on to explain how one program had their unique style of engagement when the counseling centers closed:

> So, one of our programs had a funeral. These things [the centers] were an essential part of the university, and they were such an important. . . and have such significance for what we're talking about, service to the community, and then they closed down from one day to another. And it was a shock for everybody. And so, the psychology faculty and students, they had their funeral which is a symbolic kind of ritual where it allowed them to process this, these losses. So yes, there's a lot of grief and losses that we've had. And as much as we can, we can get excited about the changes and the new and the future, but we first need to grieve the losses.

Trust, Transparency

Simone suggested other ways to align employees such as practicing more trust and transparency:

> I guess more transparency. For better or worse, there hasn't been a lot of transparency and part of it is that there is a long tradition at UNI . . . of building the plane as you fly it. Yes. Unfortunately, that's what's happening here. We're moving so fast.

One focus group member suggested it would be helpful to add a question and answer session to all-employee meetings as one way to improve buy-in:

> I think it was great what the president said [at the fall assembly], but we never get time to process information. We may get it verbally, but there's no opportunity to ask questions, and there should be a "frequently asked questions" available as well.

Another focus group member responded: "We are building that." The first member replied, "But we get that all the time and never see it. That step is always missing." Helen discussed the issue of trust when aligning employees:

> One [way to build alignment] is to address the issue of trust. I think trust is best through transparency and just . . . walk the talk. My opinion would be starting to do small things to show that we do what we say we're going to do. Just little things to start building that trust back.

She also suggested that the staff and faculty should be treated in a consistent manner to improve the alignment of the two groups:

> When we did merit pay, only faculty got merit pay, and so it was another huge divide. Even after the fall assembly, the staff was talking about how they have to come back to work right after, or they could take 2 hours vacation time (while the faculty received paid time off for the final 2 hours of that day).

In another example of the different policies facing staff versus faculty, I observed that staff focus group members teased one faculty group member who wore jeans to work that day and later confirmed there was a difference in dress code policies for the two groups. He replied, "I'm faculty," to which a staff participant responded, "Oh, it's faculty. I forgot. Different rules apply to different people." Another staff participant offered this comment: "Social justice and equality would be that we all get to wear jeans." Another staff member half-seriously said, "Just peel off the band-aid."

Internal Branding Activities

Helen talked about how shared activities may bridge the gap between faculty and staff:

> I'm not saying this particular leadership, I think even the leadership before had done this, but there feels like a huge divide between the academic side and the staff side. It would be nice to try to bring the groups back together in some way shape or form.

She described this type of effort further:

> Something that would bring the staff and faculty together. I think there's a lot of people so scared . . . when the finger pointing starts, are going to point to each other. We're all on the same team, even if it's just throwing a barbecue out here and have hotdogs or tofu dogs or whatever people want to eat . . . something to do to show that we're one team.

Rose spoke to the idea of a campaign, saying, "We need a campaign. We need an internal campaign." Nathan echoed this comment, referring to the value of internal branding activities when he said, "We've missed the mark in communicating that excitement and passion to faculty and staff." Muriel offered a concrete suggestion for an internal branding activity:

> If you allow the employees to also do kind of a forecasting thing. Like one thing I do with my students. Write out your obituary. What would you want to leave? What's the legacy? What succession would you like? Right? Kind of do the same

> thing with UNI. Not that it is dead, but how do we want to see the organization in the future? And how do you get there? What will be your part in helping? Write out where you would like to see it and what role would you play in this? And again, it goes back to the involvement—getting the employees involved.

Simone suggested a way to introduce FC to employees:

> Do a comparison of these two hypothetical students that have really different needs, and that would be served by different educational approaches. And then, I think you would have speakers, who are part of the [new] platform, talking about how it is that they work with the students. Put both profiles up on the screen. One of them is going to thrive in one way or the other. To me, neither one survives in the opposite program. So, we want to serve both of these students. So, here's what FC is all about.

Nancy pointed out that participation in interviews for (my research) study provided opportunities for creating buy-in and alignment around the rebranding, commenting, "Well, getting their input for one, like you're doing, I would say is big. Instead of slapping something on us that some outside people came up with. That's the biggest thing." The president also seemed to agree that there was value in the study for employees being interviewed about the rebranding:

> In terms of alignment, the fact that people had their opportunity to talk to you, this is another way for people to feel as though they were very much heard. And so I am pleased that a lot of people took advantage of that and I appreciate you taking the time in doing that. So, it's of service to us as much of any service to you.

Summary of Theme 3: Employees Create Meaningful Suggestions for Ways to Engage Them to Achieve Buy-in and Alignment with a New Brand

Employees offered many suggestions for how to achieve buy-in and alignment in a rebranding initiative with better communication as the unanimous choice. Examples of better communication mentioned were communicating a clear vision for UNI and sharing success stories. Employees also suggested it is essential to offer an opportunity for input, for the organization to listen, and for employees to be able to talk about changes to the organization. Sharing the context for decisions was mentioned as a way to help align employees and for leadership to explain what things are not changing. Engagement and involvement were also identified as ways to align employees along with trust, transparency, and internal branding activities.

Results of Additional Analyses

There were two additional analyses performed on the data from the transcripts. The word count analysis found frequently used words by participants reinforced the business context theme (vision, values, brand, flame, social [i.e. social justice], website) the organization’s people and groups (employees, staff, faculty, parent, community, UNI, everybody, everyone, together, president, board, institution), and other descriptions of employees’ thoughts (important, clear, always, better, feeling, perspective). More details about the process, and the word cloud generated from the keyword analysis, are provided in Appendix E-1.

The keyword analysis of the transcripts noted that “missed opportunity” was a phrase used by participants to describe the fall assembly, suggesting leadership could have done a better job of internally communicating the new strategy and rebranding initiative. The word fear was used six times by interviewees in their descriptions, and confusion and uncertainty were used many more times in their comments. The website project endeavor was described as inclusive and positive. Rowing and a symphony were descriptive terms used to suggest how employees should work together.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the study were organized around the emergent themes in this chapter. One significant observation, that the rebranding initiative(s) launched before the business strategy was decided, was noted in the context theme section. A comparison of the data with Miller et al.'s (2014) list of enablers and barriers to successful rebranding initiatives resulted in the other two major findings that are explained in this section. All three major findings are further explored in Chapter 5.

Major Finding 1: The Rebranding Initiative(s) Launched Before the Business Strategy Was/Were Decided

UNI employees were confused by two independent rebranding initiatives that were both launched at UNI without any communication and prior to final business decisions being made or communicated about UNI's strategy. UNI leadership and the Parent were debating whether the strategy for UNI to deliver education would become 100% online, or if it would add FC to the two existing modalities and the strategy would become a three-legged stool.

Triangulation of the interviews, observations of the timing of the external launch of the rebranding, and preparation of Figure 4.2, the timeline, revealed the sequence of events. The business strategy decision was made months after both rebranding initiatives were launched. Internal communication of both the strategic decision and the new tagline occurred several weeks after the decision was made, and months after the launch of two rebranding initiatives.

Major Finding 2. The Employee Perspective of a Rebranding Initiative Aligns with Rebranding Research on Enablers and Barriers

The second major finding was made upon completion of the thematic analysis process. I observed that the employees' descriptions of the rebranding initiative at UNI and their suggestions for how to achieve buy-in and alignment of employees in a rebranding initiative seemed to match with Miller et al.'s (2014) list of enablers and barriers to successful rebranding initiatives introduced in Table 2.3 of this study. I compared the themes with the research as shown in the side-by-side comparison in Table 4.2.

Check marks within Table 4.2 indicate the employees mentioned the enabler in their comments or indicate the participants referenced the barrier. Only the integrated marketing program enabler was not mentioned by participants in either their descriptions or their suggestions. In Miller et al.'s (2014) research that analyzed 76 organizations, it was not a requirement for an organization to display all of the enablers or barriers. Rather, researchers used the list as a reference in the evaluation of the success or failure of rebranding initiatives.

Table 4.2

Themes of Employees' Descriptions and Suggestions Align with Rebranding Research

Miller et al. (2014) Research	Employees' Descriptions and Suggestions

Enablers	Themes	Sub-heading
Strong rebranding leadership ✓	Suggestions	Leadership should provide context Trust and transparency
Developing brand understanding ✓	Descriptions	A discrepancy in the definition of the ‘rebranding’ Employees’ description of the rebranding messages (main change) Employees’ description of the rebranding messages (what the tagline means)
	Suggestions	Communication
Internal branding activities ✓	Descriptions	The website
	Suggestions	Internal branding activities
		Engagement
		Communication (success stories)
Continuity of brand attributes ✓	Descriptions	Historical references to previous taglines
	Suggestions	Continuity
Stakeholder coordination ✓	Descriptions	The website
Integrated marketing program	---	---

Barriers	Themes	Sub-heading
Autocratic rebranding approach ✓	Context	Leadership approach Organization’s decision to rebrand
	Suggestions	Engagement
Stakeholder tensions ✓	Context	Organization’s decision to rebrand
	Suggestions	Trust and transparency
Narrow brand re-vision ✓	Descriptions	A discrepancy in the definition of the ‘rebranding’
Inadequate research ✓	Suggestions	Leadership provide context
Inadequate customer consideration ✓	Suggestions	Leadership provide context

Enablers and Barriers (Miller et al., 2014).

Major Finding 3: Employees’ Descriptions and Suggestions Indicate Inadequate Employee Consideration

As reported in Chapter 2, researchers have identified employees as the most significant factor in projecting an organization’s brand (Stuart, 2012). Although employees play an important role in representing the brand of an organization, it was observed that employees are not mentioned on the current list from Miller et al. (2014) of enablers and barriers for the success of rebranding initiatives. Inadequate customer consideration is listed as a barrier. In reporting the employees' descriptions and suggestions, I recalled they shared numerous examples of inadequate employee consideration throughout the rebranding initiatives at UNI.

Therefore, the transcripts were reviewed once more, and code numbers were noted for instances where employees' descriptions and suggestions expressed concern about lack of an employee perspective on the rebranding initiative at UNI. A column was added to the coding key (see Appendix D) to record these instances as evidence of inadequate employee consideration. Table 4.3 was then created to link the

Table 4.3

Employees' Descriptions and Suggestions Indicate Inadequate Employee Consideration

	Themes	Subheading
Inadequate employee consideration	Context	Organization's decision to rebrand
	Descriptions	A discrepancy in the definition of the 'rebranding'
		Employees' initial reactions
		Employees' description of their feelings
		Employees' description of the rebranding messages (main change)
		Employees' description of the rebranding messages (what the tagline means)
		Employees' description of the rebranding messages (opinion of tagline)
		Historical references
		The website
		What success looks like

Suggestions	Communication
	Provide an opportunity for input
	Leadership should provide context
	Engagement
	Trust and transparency
	Internal branding activities

information from the coding key to the corresponding subheading in Chapter 4 that reported the employees' descriptions and suggestions with indications of inadequate consideration of employees in the rebranding initiative at UNI. The discovery that, from the employees' perspective, the inadequate employee consideration during the rebranding was evidence of a barrier to the success of the initiative became the third major finding.

The column on the coding key was later named major findings and was updated to also link evidence of the first two major findings to the corresponding code number. All three major findings are discussed in Chapter 5 along with two propositions that result from these findings and recommendations of areas for future study.

Reconciliation of Themes with Major Findings

Table 4.4 was prepared to summarize the reconciliation of the three themes with the three major findings at one glance.

Table 4.4

Themes and Corresponding Major Findings

Theme	Major Finding

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

Summary

Organizational rebrands can be risky, and while employees play a critical role in representing the brand of an organization and employee buy-in is vital to the success of a rebranding initiative, there is a lack of research about the employee viewpoint of rebranding initiatives. This study reports the employee perspective through exploration of how employees at one organization, UNI, described a rebranding experience and their suggestions for ways to engage employees to achieve buy-in and alignment with a new brand.

In Chapter 5, study findings are merged with the research questions and conclusions are drawn about how the emergent themes align with the guiding research questions. Also, the alignment of the findings to the problem statement and how the findings apply to business administration are described. The implications of the findings for managers, recommendations for future studies, and a closing commentary are also provided in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The employee perspective of a rebranding initiative was explored at a private university in California by researching the following two fundamental questions:

- How did employees describe their rebranding experience?
- What were the employees' perceptions of ways to engage them in achieving buy-in and alignment with the new brand?

Through the exploration of these questions, the study fulfilled its purpose: having a better understanding of the employee viewpoint of a rebranding initiative contributes to building better overall rebrands for organizations and their stakeholders including customers, organization leaders, organizers of these initiatives and, of course, for employees.

Major findings included that the rebranding initiative was launched before the business strategy was decided, the employees' perspective aligned with rebranding research on enablers and barriers to successful rebranding, and that there was inadequate consideration of employees in the rebranding. These three findings led to propositions to add to the list of barriers as outlined and discussed below.

The findings and conclusions are then applied to the problem statement with explanations offered for any discrepancies noted. Implications for business administration and recommendations for action and future research are provided, along with closing comments.

Discussion of Findings, Propositions, and Conclusion

The major findings are summarized and discussed below along with the two propositions that resulted from the findings. A reconciliation of themes, major findings, and propositions is provided. A conclusion is drawn, and the outcome of UNI's rebranding is discussed.

Major Finding 1: The Rebranding Initiative Launched Before the Business Strategy Was Decided

As shown in Figure 4.2, which was based on employee descriptions and corroborated by examination of external marketing materials, while the business strategy was recently decided and only vaguely communicated, the two rebranding initiatives were launched months before that decision. As described by employees, many were unaware or not aligned with either the organization's business strategy or the rebranding initiative.

As noted in Chapter 2, internal marketing should precede external marketing so that employees can deliver the brand promise via external marketing (Pinar, Girard, Trapp, & Eser, 2016). There is additional research to support that employee alignment with organizational strategic goals enhances organizational outcomes, and that high-performing organizations are characterized by employee alignment with goals (Alagaraja, & Shuck, 2015). So, if the organization's goals are not yet known, employees cannot possibly be aligned with the goals. Chad (2016) reported that without employee buy-in, a rebranding is likely to fail.

In Chapter 2 it was reported that organization rebranding is a strategic event or series of events and, to be successful, it must be aligned with the overarching organization strategy. The potential for creating an empty brand message is significant if leaders do not “walk the talk” and demonstrate the new strategic direction regarding the organization’s culture (Stuart, 2018). Since the strategy was not known before the launch of the rebranding initiatives, the rebranding could not be aligned with the organizational strategy, and there was no “talk to walk” as the leaders had not made a decision, let alone shared it with employees before they launched the rebrand.

The enablers and barriers list by Miller et al. (2014) is designed to identify ways to increase the likelihood of successful rebranding initiatives. The list does not currently include any criteria about the importance of business strategy, the alignment of the rebranding with business strategy, or the sequencing of a rebranding initiative relative to a decision about strategy which leads to Proposition 1.

Proposition 1: The Research List on Rebranding Enablers and Barriers Should Expand to Include Lack of a Clear Business Strategy as a Barrier

Once the business strategy and goals are known, as reported in Chapter 2, internal marketing should precede external marketing as an organization should not promote a product or service before the employees are ready to provide it (Du Preez & Bendizen, 2015). By adding lack of a clear business strategy as a barrier to Miller et al.’s (2014) research list, it calls attention to the importance and the sequence of the alignment of rebranding initiatives with business strategy. Alternatively, the presence of a clear business strategy could be added as an enabler. Either way, the sequence of making a strategic decision relative to taking rebranding actions matters. Proposition 1 is nicknamed Business Before Branding, and if correct, could lead to a significant contribution to rebranding theory.

Major Finding 2. The Employee Perspective of a Rebranding Initiative Aligns with Rebranding Research on Enablers and Barriers

The employees' descriptions of the rebranding initiative at UNI, and their suggestions for how to achieve buy-in and alignment of employees in a rebranding initiative, matched side-by-side with Miller et al.'s (2014) list of enablers and barriers to successful rebranding initiatives in Table 4.2. A closer examination of the researchers' list of enablers and barriers led to the observation that employees were not listed on either the list of enablers or barriers, and this omission led to Major Finding 3.

Major Finding 3: Employees' Descriptions and Suggestions Indicate Inadequate Employee Consideration

Following the development of Table 4.2, further analysis was performed to identify employees' descriptions and suggestions from the coding key (see Appendix D) that were not listed in Table 4.2. This analysis led to the creation of Table 4.3. After further analysis of the data, the third major finding was confirmed that there was inadequate consideration of employees in the rebranding initiative at UNI.

Examination of Miller et al.'s (2014) list indicated there was inadequate consideration of customers on the list of barriers, but employees were not called out on either the list of barriers or enablers. As noted in the literature review, barriers impede the rebranding process and limit the success of the initiative. The observation of the omission of employees from the list, and the descriptions and suggestions by employees that indicated inadequate consideration of employees in the rebranding initiative, led to the development of Proposition 2: To expand Miller et al.'s rebranding research list to include inadequate employee consideration as a barrier. Therefore, Major Finding 3 led to Proposition 2.

Proposition 2. The Research List on Rebranding Enablers and Barriers Should Expand to Include Inadequate Employee Consideration as a Barrier

There is strong support from research reports about the importance to consider employees in a rebranding initiative. As reported in Chapter 2, literature regarding employee involvement in rebranding is “limited despite its importance” (Hankinson et al., 2007, p. 237), employee roles have been overlooked in rebranding literature (Lee, 2017), and successful rebranding requires input from employees (Gotsi & Andriopoulos, 2007). Also reported in the literature review was that there are positive rebranding results when communications with employees are participative, aligned with core values, and leaders clearly explain the rationale for the rebranding (Bolhuis et al., 2018). Schepers and Nijssen (2018) found that employees humanize the brand to customers and that this behavior is critically important in organizational rebranding initiatives. Employees are critical to the success of implementing the rebranding process, and research supports that they should be engaged early, openly, and honestly (Lee, 2017). In sum, there is strong support in the research to include inadequate employee consideration as a barrier.

Reconciliation of Themes, Major Findings and Propositions

Table 5.1 is provided as a reference guide for how to reconcile the three themes with the three major findings and the two propositions. The first two columns were reported in Table 4.1. The proposition column was added to create Table 5.1 so all three categories can be viewed at once and the linkages between them can be easily understood.

Table 5.1

Reconciliation of Themes, Major Findings, and Propositions

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

The two propositions were developed based on conclusions from research of the employee perspective of a rebranding initiative provided by this study. Yin (2018) explained that a case study design provides an opportunity to shed light on theoretical concepts and to go beyond the specific case to strive for generalizable findings, known as "analytic generalizations" (p. 38). These lessons learned either corroborate existing theoretical concepts or are based on new concepts that go beyond the setting for the specific case that was studied, as is the case for these two propositions. Yin (2018) describes these generalizations (propositions) as "level two inferences" because the generalization is at a conceptual level higher than that of the specific case as shown in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1. Second-level inferences/propositions. Adapted from *Case Study Research and Application. Design and Methods* (p. 39), by R. Yin, 2018, Los Angeles, CA: Sage. Copyright 2018 by Sage.

Generalization can only be achieved if the case study design has been appropriately informed by theory and can, therefore, be seen to add to the established theory. Analytical generalization takes a previously developed theory as a template and compares with the results of the case study (Rowley, 2002). These propositions propose additions to the existing Miller et al. (2014) rebranding theory about enablers and barriers to successful rebranding initiatives.

The conclusions drawn from this study would not be complete without application of the lessons learned from the study to evaluate the success of UNI's rebranding initiative(s).

Conclusion: Overall, UNI's Rebranding Initiatives Were Unsuccessful

Table 4.2 compared the findings of the employee perspective compared to rebranding theory by Miller et al. (2014) regarding what elements enable a successful rebranding initiative or serve as a barrier to one. The Miller et al. list of enablers and barriers is used as a scorecard in Table 5.2 to apply how the participants described UNI's

Table 5.2

Application of Enablers and Barriers List by Miller et al. (2014) to Descriptions of Participants about the Two Rebranding Initiatives at UNI

Enablers		
	Rebranding led by UNI (1)	Rebranding led by Parent (2)
Strong rebranding leadership	Little evidence	No evidence
Developing brand understanding	✓	No evidence
Internal branding activities	✓	No evidence
Continuity of brand attributes	Little evidence	No evidence
Stakeholder coordination	✓	No evidence
An integrated marketing program	No evidence	No evidence
Barriers		
Autocratic rebranding approach		✓
Stakeholder tensions		✓
Narrow brand re-vision	✓	✓
Inadequate research		✓
Inadequate customer consideration		✓

rebranding initiative. Because participants described UNI's rebranding concerning two different initiatives, one led by UNI (primarily about repositioning on the website), and the other effort led by the Parent (the new tagline and ad campaign about FC), the scores are reported separately. The scores were assigned based on the descriptions made by the participants.

Researchers found evidence that having more enablers enhances the potential for a strong outcome, and having more barriers increased the likelihood of a weak outcome (Miller et al., 2014). As outlined in Chapter 2, researchers defined a strong outcome to be a case where one of three indicators of success was present, and a weak outcome had no indicators of success. Researchers defined the indicators of success as increased business success, met stated goals for the rebranding, and had strong positive references. The UNI-led initiative could be considered successful as it had some strong positive references about the collaborative website project and had three enablers versus only one barrier. However, that rebranding was taken over by the parent-led initiative and superseded the UNI rebranding initiative. The parent-led initiative showed no evidence of success, and yet displayed evidence of all of the barriers and none of the enablers. Therefore, the overall conclusion was that the net result of UNI's combined rebranding initiatives was unsuccessful at the point of this study's submission.

Application of Findings and Conclusions to the Problem Statement

Throughout Chapters 4 and 5, the current study's findings and results have been compared to the prior research of Miller et al. (2014). It is also important to compare to other prior related research and to discuss how the findings and conclusions from the study can be applied to the problem statement.

The problem is organizational rebrands can be expensive and risky, and they are conducted without any guarantee of success. Employees play a critical role in representing the brand of an organization to customers, and employee buy-in is vital to the success of a rebranding initiative; yet, researchers have mostly ignored the employee viewpoint of rebranding.

- How do employees describe a rebranding experience?
- What are the employees' perceptions of ways to engage them in achieving buy-in and alignment with the new brand?

Cost

As noted in Chapter 2 and the problem statement, rebranding literature often reports that organizational rebrands are expensive, which contributes to the high-risk factor, also frequently mentioned in the literature. One surprising observation was that none of the interviewees mentioned the cost of either rebranding initiative in their comments. It is possible this is explained by the fact that there were not any internal branding activities funded—the UNI website project was budgeted for long ago—and employees do not have clear visibility of the Parent's marketing expenditures.

Success

There seemed to be general agreement about how to define the success of the rebranding. In Chapter 4, it was reported that the board member mentioned that the success of the rebranding would be to achieve or exceed targeted enrollments. Other employees also mentioned increased enrollment as one measure of success. Miller et al.

(2014) list one of three measures of success is to achieve the stated goals of the rebranding.

In Chapter 2, it was reported that employees are the most significant factor in projecting an organization's brand (Stuart, 2012) and also that without employee buy-in, a rebrand is not likely to be successful (Chad, 2016). With all of the confusion and uncertainty expressed by employees, it is fair to say the employees have not bought into the rebranding. There was not even agreement or awareness about the scope of the rebranding initiative(s).

Descriptions

All interviewees described UNI's brand in different ways. Because participants had different perceptions of the scope of the rebranding as described earlier, it follows that their descriptions—of what the primary changes were, what the new tagline means and what they thought of the new tagline that was created by the Parent marketing team—were also wide ranging. This pattern matches the definition of *brand* found in Chapelo (2015), which reported that because brand is a subjective term that exists in each person's brain, it makes sense for employees to offer different definitions. Chapelo (2015) went on to report that some researchers describe brand as a "blend of emotional and rational" (p. 152) factors and as "multidimensional" where products or services are infused with values. UNI's president described the rebranding as "multifaceted" in his initial description of the rebranding initiative, while other employees expressed either rational or emotional responses as reported in Table 4.1 (personal communication, November 8, 2015). Throughout Chapter 4, there are many employee comments and concerns reported about UNI's strategy, which seemed to raise questions about what the organization stands for and where it is headed.

Vision and Culture

Hatch and Schultz (2003) researched the link between organizational brands, vision, and culture. They reported that the most successful brands are the ones that connect strategic vision to an organizational culture where organizational culture can be a source of competitive advantage, but only if brand values are respectful of that culture and are embraced as part of the organizational brand (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). This could help explain why the suggested revision to the tagline, "It's Your Time," resonated better with employees than "It's About Time." The word "your" added an emotional tie to the organization's founding purpose to provide adult education to working adults—the target customers—who struggle with balancing education with work. Additionally, many employees made historical references to past taglines that were aligned with the values of the organization, while there was little support for the new generic tagline, "It's About Time."

Findings, Conclusions, and Problem Statement

Finding answers to the research questions by analyzing the descriptions and suggestions made by employees led to the three major findings of the study: (a) the rebranding initiative(s) launched before the business strategy was/were decided, (b) the employee perspective of a rebranding initiative aligns with Miller et al.'s (2014) rebranding research on enablers and barriers, and (c) employees' descriptions and suggestions indicate inadequate employee consideration. These major findings led to two propositions to expand the enablers and barriers list to include lack of a clear business strategy before rebranding and inadequate employee consideration as barriers.

Implications for Business Administration

In this study, the employee perspective of a rebranding was shared, and two new propositions were proposed. Managers can apply the (Miller et al., 2014) enablers and barriers research to inform their rebranding practice and improve their organizational rebranding outcomes.

An important conclusion of the Miller et al. (2014) study was that organizations should avoid or minimize barriers to successful rebranding outcomes, as weak rebranding outcomes are associated with barriers. Enablers can help to prevent or overcome barriers, as organizations can utilize them to promote strong rebranding outcomes as part of their rebranding strategy.

As part of an overall internal communication strategy, management should develop a rebranding communication plan. Researchers identified the critical outcomes of effective internal communication strategy, including: shared vision, job/personal satisfaction, development of a service focus, empowerment, commitment, and loyalty (Chapelo, 2015). Study participants were unanimous in their suggestion that communication was critical to achieving alignment and buy-in in a rebranding initiative. In Chapter 2, it was reported that the most critical enabler from the Miller et al. (2014) list was strong rebranding leadership, and the most significant barrier was autocratic rebranding approach. Combining research with the participants' comments implies strong rebranding leadership and effective internal communication should yield a successful outcome.

Management should take "the bull by the horns" and create an environment where employees experience the organization as goal-directed and concerned about people, the primary driver of employee engagement (Schneider et al., 2018).

Recommendations for Action

Leaders of organizational rebranding initiatives should develop an understanding of enablers and barriers, in general, and how they relate to employees. This knowledge would allow organizations to take a proactive approach to prevent failure of rebranding initiatives by adopting enablers and avoiding the known barriers.

In Chapter 2, it was reported that employees are considered by researchers to be critical to the success of implementing the rebranding process, and that they should be engaged early, openly, and honestly (Lee, 2017). While UNI certainly did not involve employees early in the process, they still have an opportunity to engage them and to be more open as the rebranding process continues to evolve.

UNI leadership could engage employees to support UNI's social media outreach with students as part of an integrated marketing program. Additionally, if the tagline is modified to "It's Your Time" instead of "It's About Time," employees could be engaged in internal branding activities (an enabler) to explore the changing customer (student base) at UNI, and how students may relate to that tagline about their time as adult learners. These types of activities also support the developing brand understanding enabler, which counters the autocratic rebranding approach and inadequate customer consideration barriers. As noted in Chapter 2, researchers report that the customer perceives employees as credible and help to humanize the brand, and that this behavior has been found to be especially significant in organizational rebranding initiatives (Schepers & Nijssen, 2018).

Additionally, management could develop activities to align the employees' roles with the business goal, which would achieve increased enrollment under the three-legged stool strategy. This would avoid the proposed inadequate employee consideration barrier and promote the stakeholder coordination enabler.

UNI's president reacted positively to my onsite suggestions that UNI should develop an internal communication strategy and also dedicate a resource to internal communication. The board member stressed the importance of having employees aligned with the rebranding initiative and was open to the suggestion that one KPI of the rebranding could be the number of employees that received rebranding training. This would serve to enhance their brand understanding, an enabler. Following up on these suggestions would be another way to implement changes to address the current rebranding situation at UNI.

Poor Organizational Communication Can Amplify an Organization's Business Problems

Challenges in the industry business (higher education) led to business challenges (declining enrollment) at the organization. UNI leadership did not communicate the strategy, despite issues of a significant acquisition, a new platform, major layoffs, or a rebranding. Employees expressed how this lack of communication led to other issues, such as lack of trust, fear/panic/uncertainty, lack of alignment, and lack of excitement for the rebrand. These issues could lead to a further lack of enrollments. Enrollments in the past were fueled by faculty and alumni recommendations which may be negatively impacted by the communication issues.

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

Recommendations for Further Research

This exploratory study could be replicated to gain greater generalizability for the propositions including, lack of a clear business strategy and inadequate employee consideration as barriers. Also, the study could be replicated at a different type of organization, other than a nonprofit higher education organization, for the same purpose.

While much of the research and managerial interest around rebranding centers on the success of rebranding initiatives, there is not a widely held way to measure the success of initiatives. Miller et al. (2014) defined the indicators of success as increased business success, met stated goals for the rebranding, and had strong positive references. However, perhaps a future quantitative or mixed methods study could determine a more definitive way to measure the success of rebranding initiatives. In addition, it would be even more fascinating if the measurement incorporated some element tied to employees such as their alignment, engagement, or understanding of the new brand message.

Future studies could include more than 14 interview participants and nine members of a focus group. While these combined numbers represented about 20% of

UNI's full-time staff and faculty, future studies may be able to cover a broader base of employees at even more organizations.

The two propositions could be tested in a future study. The Miller et al. (2014) researchers studied 76 cases from 61 articles to develop their list of enablers and barriers. The two propositions from this study to expand the list to include lack of a clear business strategy and inadequate employee consideration as barriers could be studied by other researchers. Perhaps the perceived effects discovered in this study could be deepened or confirmed by other researchers across more organizations.

While the present study is focused on the employee viewpoint, as it had been previously ignored, this does not imply that studies should only view stakeholders' views in isolation. Future studies could take a multi-stakeholder view and explore the interactions between stakeholders. Merrilees (2017) proposed a new organizational brand model from a customer experience-centric perspective described with traffic light references as outlined in Chapter 2. Given brands are co-created through experiences between an organization and its stakeholders, especially employees (Spear, 2015), future researchers could explore the interaction between employees and customers in a rebranding initiative.

Closing

Researchers have identified employees as the most significant factor in projecting an organization's brand (Stuart, 2012), and that is essential to understand how employees perceive the brand management process (Bravo et al., 2017). Yet, researchers have largely ignored the employee view of rebranding initiatives (Chad, 2016) and the internal branding of employees (Müller, 2018).

The purpose of this case was never intended to merely add the perspective of employees to current research or fulfill the requirements for a dissertation. The broader goal was to raise awareness concerning the lack of the employee perspective in rebranding initiatives, and to share their input, which may lead to more successful rebrandings in the future, and more engaged and aligned employees.

This study contributes to the body of organizational rebranding knowledge in several ways. First, it adds the employee perspective from a single case and organizes it into defined themes. Second, it confirms an accepted model of organizational rebranding by comparison to the employee perspective and proposes the addition of two barriers to success. Third, it highlights potentially productive avenues for future research, which could extend organizational rebranding theory.

The hallmark of a strong organization brand includes two critical factors: (a) a point of differentiation to give a competitive advantage, and (b) consistent execution (Merrilees, 2017). Employees communicate the brand's promise across all contact points, and their behavior can become a competitive advantage if they genuinely believe in the brand's values (Chapelo, 2015). It could be argued that both of UNI's rebranding initiatives were at least trying to differentiate from other universities in offering a competitive advantage, but consistent execution of a brand must include employees in the equation. As Everett (2016) said in his introduction to *Corporate Brand Personality*, "Your people are your brand" (para. 4). This study brings the perspective of the people of UNI who had been largely ignored in the Parent's rebranding process—and they had a lot to say. Their descriptions and suggestions were found to be consistent with a well-known rebranding model for achieving success and avoiding failure.

Rebranding researchers report that rebrands are expensive (Stuart, 2018), and more fail than succeed (Singh et al., 2012). Employees play a critical role in representing the brand of an organization to customers (Spear, 2015), and employee buy-in is vital to the success of a rebranding initiative. Yet, the employee viewpoint of rebranding has largely been ignored by researchers (Chad, 2016), which creates a barrier to success.

This study shared the voices of employees from one organization as they described their rebranding experiences and offered suggestions on how to align and engage employees with a rebranding initiative. Listening to employees can tear down that barrier and inform organizations about how to build a better rebrand.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Questions

Below is a list of interview questions for semi-structured interviews with participants. It is anticipated that I will ask this common set of questions to all 10-15 participants and that new questions will surface during interviews that will also be collected and included in the study.

Basic:

- Are you aware the organization is engaged in a rebranding initiative?
- How did you first learn about the change to the brand?
- Can you please describe the main change is to the organization's brand?
- Can you please explain what the new brand message means?
- Did you participate in the organization's large group rebranding information session in early November? If yes, what were your impressions of the session?
- Have you or are you planning to participate in a focus group about the rebranding? If yes, what were your impressions of the focus group?
- Overall, how would you describe the rebranding initiative?

Successful rebranding outcomes:

- From your perspective, what defines a successful organizational rebranding outcome? (Researcher may need to prompt some ways to define success)
- Has the organization's rebranding been successful so far? If not yet, do you believe it will be at some point? Describe why or why not?

- What would it take to close any gap between where the organization is now and where it will be when it can claim the rebranding is successful?

Employees and brand representation:

- Describe how employees are critical to representing a brand.
- Are you aligned with the new brand? Why or why not?
- What is your role to deliver the new brand (to customers)? (External customers will be defined as students, but participants may also identify internal customers in their responses)

Ways to engage employees to achieve buy-in and alignment:

- From your standpoint, what are ways to engage employees to achieve buy-in and alignment? Why?
- Do any of the rebranding activities stand out in your mind? If so, tell me why. (Participants may need to be prompted as to what the activities were, so they can respond to what worked and what did not)

APPENDIX B: IRB Approval Letter

Institutional Review Board
Certificate of Approval

IRB ID# Miller_Williamson101918

Principal Investigator (if faculty research):
Student Researcher: Debra Miller
Faculty Advisor: Laura Williamson
Department: School of Management DBA

Title: Building better organizational rebrands: Exploring the employee point of view.
Approved on: October 19, 2018
Renewal Date: October 19, 2019

- ☐ Full Board Review
- X Expedited Review (US)
- ☐ Delegated Review (Can)
- ☐ Exempt (US)

CERTIFICATION

City University of Seattle has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The Faculty Advisor Laura Williamson and the student researcher Debra Miller have the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original Ethical Review Protocol submitted for ethics review. This ***Certificate of Approval*** is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol, consent process, or documents. Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the IRB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion.

Brian Guthrie Ph D, RSW, RCSW
Chair, IRB City University of Seattle

APPENDIX C: Consent Form

My name is Deb Miller, I am a doctoral student at CityU of Seattle in the School of Management working on a Doctor of Business Administration degree. As part of that degree program, I am conducting a research study about rebranding initiatives at organizations with an emphasis on exploring the employee perspective of rebranding. The project includes interviews with employees of all levels of the university and you've been selected to be a participant in the study.

Participation is voluntary, you have the right to withdraw at any point without negative consequences, your participation is confidential, and your responses, if used in the report, will be reported with pseudonyms.

Participants can contact me if there are questions about the research. My contact information is XXXXX@cityuniversity.edu.

APPENDIX D: Coding Key

Coding Key					
Code #	**Preliminary Codes**	*****	**Sub-themes**	**Themes**	**Major Findings**
1				Environment	1
2			Mission	Describe Business	1
4			Reputation	Describe Business	1
3			Brand	Describe Business	1
5			Culture	Describe Business	1
6	Future		Vision	Describe Business	1
7	Vertical		Vision	Describe Business	1
8	Board of Directors		Vision	Describe Business	1
9	Parent		Strategy	Describe Business	1
10	FC		Strategy	Describe Business	1
11	Support (for FC)		Strategy	Describe Business	1
12	Modality		Strategy	Describe Business	1
14	Social Justice (Passion)		Values	Describe Business	1
13	Continuity		Values	Describe Business	1
15	Founding		Values	Describe Business	1
16	Why UNI?		Values	Describe Business	1
17	Type		Customer	Describe Business	1
18	Quantity		Customer	Describe Business	1
19	Quality		Product	Describe Business	1
20	Innovative		Product	Describe Business	1
21	Online		Product	Describe Business	1
22	Program		Product	Describe Business	1
23	Differentiation		Product	Describe Business	1
24	Parent Organization		Org Structure	Describe Business	1
25	2 presidents		Org Structure	Describe Business	1
26	Marketing		Org Structure	Describe Business	1
27	Internal comm (grp)		Org Structure	Describe Business	1
28	Overall		Communication	Describe Business	1/3
29	Trust		Communication	Describe Business	1/3
30	Channel (overall)		Communication	Describe Business	1/3
31	Channel Email		Communication	Describe Business	1/3
32	Channel Senate		Communication	Describe Business	1/3
33	Leadership (UNI) (style)		Communication	Describe Business	1/3
34	Parent Organization		Communication	Describe Business	1/3
35	Relationships		Communication	Describe Business	1/3
36	External		Communication	Describe Business	1
37	Why (strategy)	RQ1	Context	Describe Rebrand	3
38	Dots	RQ1	Context	Describe Rebrand	3
39	Fall Assembly	RQ1	Channel	Describe Rebrand	3
40	Other	RQ1	Channel	Describe Rebrand	3
41	External	RQ1	Channel	Describe Rebrand	3
42	FC /Rebrand	RQ1	Confusion (message)	Describe Rebrand	3
43	Overall	RQ1	Confusion	Describe Rebrand	3

44	want to be a good soldier	RQ1	Lack of info	Describe Rebrand	3
45	Uncertainty (overall)	RQ1	Lack of info	Describe Rebrand	3
46	What's next?	RQ1	Trust (transparency, credibility)	Describe Rebrand	3
47	Autocratic	RQ1,B	Leadership	Describe Rebrand	2
48A	Your role	RQ1,E	Brand (ambassador)	Describe Rebrand	3
48B	Is it even a Rebrand?	RQ1,B	Scope	Describe Rebrand	2/3
49		RQ1	Why (Rebrand?)	Describe Rebrand	2/3
50		RQ1	Successful (Outcome)	Describe Rebrand	2/3
51		RQ1,E	How and when (aware)	Describe Rebrand	2/3
52		RQ1,E	Main change (to Rebrand, understands)	Describe Rebrand	2
53	What it means	RQ1,E	Tagline	Describe Rebrand	2
54	Opinion (of)	RQ1,E	Tagline (incl It's *Your* Time)	Describe Rebrand	3
55		RQ1,E	Historical (reference)	Describe Rebrand	2
56	As intended	RQ1,E	W2site	Describe Rebrand	2
57	Bios (inclusive)	RQ1,E	W2site	Describe Rebrand	2
58	Overall	RQ1,E	W2site	Describe Rebrand	2
59		RQ1,E	Aware (of Rebranding) Y/N	Describe Rebrand	2/3
60		RQ1	Negative (description)	Describe Rebrand	3
61		RQ1	Positive (description)	Describe Rebrand	3
62		RQ1	Neutral (description)	Describe Rebrand	3
63		RQ2	Better communication	Suggest How Align Emps	3
64		RQ2,E	Engage (involve)	Suggest How Align Emps	2
65		RQ2,E	(Give) context (clarity)	Suggest How Align Emps	2
66		RQ2,E	(Give) continuity	Suggest How Align Emps	2
67		RQ2	Give clear vision	Suggest How Align Emps	3
68		RQ2	Credibility	Suggest How Align Emps	2/3
69		RQ2	Listen (input/talk for decision)	Suggest How Align Emps	3
70		RQ2	Funeral	Suggest How Align Emps	3
71		RQ2,B	Not autocratic	Suggest How Align Emps	2
72		RQ2,E	Inclusive (faculty and staff)	Suggest How Align Emps	2
73			Transparency	Suggest How Align Emps	3
74		RQ2,E	Together (we can)	Suggest How Align Emps	2
75		RQ2,E	Internal branding (activities)	Suggest How Align Emps	2
76			My study	Misc	3
	*E= Enabler B= Barrier RQ1 = Research Question 1 RQ2 = Research Question 2				

Major Finding #1 – The Rebranding initiative(s) launched before the business strategy was decided. This was *not* 'business before branding.'

Major Finding #2 - The employee perspective of a Rebranding initiative aligns with Miller et al. (2014) rebranding research about enablers and barriers.

Major Finding #3: Employees' descriptions and suggestions indicate 'inadequate employee consideration' on the Miller et al. (2018) enablers and barriers list.

APPENDIX E: Word Count Analysis

The word count analysis was referenced in Chapter 4, under the results of additional analysis sub-heading. The word cloud application took the word count list and generated the diagram below, Figure E.1. The word cloud is a visual way to share the results of the word count analysis. As explained in Chapter 4, the high word counts reinforced the business context theme (vision, values, brand, flame, social [i.e. social justice], and website), the organization's people and groups (employees, staff, faculty, parent, community, UNI, everybody, everyone, together, president, board, institution), and other descriptions of employees' thoughts (important, clear, always, better, feeling, perspective).

Figure E.1. Word cloud from transcripts of interviews.

Process to Develop the Word Cloud

All words that occurred 17 or fewer times in the document were deleted. The document source was the Comments column of the Transcripts document. The website that generated the word cloud was found at https://www.wordclouds.com/ The list was sorted first by frequency and then by alpha and then was adjusted for nearly similar words such as “program” and “programs.” A list of the most frequent and relevant words was created, as shown above. Then the word cloud program was applied to the top 50 words as shown in Figure E.1.

Top 50 Words for Word Cloud By Frequency and Relevance
315 Think
197 People
183 Students
182 Programs
160 Time
104 Courses
136 Change
114 New
113 Talk
111 Now
80 Yes
80 Communicate
84 Online
81 Different
78 Faculty
67 Feeling
63 University
52 Parent
51 Marketing
50 Education
50 Website
49 Social
49 Good
48 Organization
47 Rebranding
46 Staff
41 Core
39 Vision
39 Brand
35 Important
35 Stuff
34 Always
34 Clear
34 Help
32 Everybody
20 Everyone
32 Board
31 Employees
31 Community
30 Service
28 Perspective
28 Together
27 Justice
27 Better
26 Flame
25 President
25 UNI
24 Decisions
24 Values
23 Institution