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Corporate rebranding: an employee-focused nonprofit case study

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to examine the process by which a nonprofit organisation conducted corporate rebranding; and assess the relevance of the principles of corporate rebranding originally developed by Merrilees and Miller (2008) in relation to for-profit organisations. A community-owned nonprofit organisation that recently introduced corporate rebranding was examined. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with employees from all organisational levels explored the rebranding process and employee feelings towards the process. Findings revealed that, whilst ultimately successful, rebranding did not progress smoothly. Problems related to initial management attempts to utilise minimal external expertise, plus low levels of employee involvement and buy-in. Findings suggest all six principles of corporate rebranding proposed by Merrilees and Miller (2008) should be used by management as a guide to increase efficiency of the rebranding process; and extends these principles to a nonprofit context. The paper also pioneers examination of corporate rebranding from a change management perspective.

Keywords: corporate rebranding, rebrand, re-brand, nonprofit, non-profit, change management

Introduction

The dynamic and ever-changing business environment necessitates organisations to regularly examine their business strategy and make adjustments if deemed appropriate. Organisations should monitor their corporate brand due to the "need to remain relevant and sustain their appeal" (Gotsi & Andriopoulos, 2007, p. 341). Organisational review of corporate brand may subsequently result in a decision to rebrand. However, corporate rebranding is risky (Amujo & Otubanjo, 2012), generally expensive and if not conducted properly, years of corporate brand equity development can be lost (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). Corporate rebranding is regarded as an "emerging" (Miller, Merrilees & Yakimova, 2014, p. 265) and "embryonic" (Juntunen, 2014, p. 114) area of research. Extant research covers a mix of both theory and practice, typically via case study (e.g. Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). Utilising previous learnings based upon for-profit organisations, Merrilees and Miller (2008) proposed six principles of corporate rebranding. These six principles of rebranding have, however, yet to be explicitly examined within various nonprofit organisational contexts. Given the differences between for-profit and nonprofit organisations, it is currently unknown whether the principles of rebranding have relevance in various nonprofit contexts.

The key purpose of this paper is thus to address this gap in our knowledge, and hence examine the manner in which corporate rebranding was conducted within a specific nonprofit community based organisation, and assess the utility of the six principles of corporate rebranding proposed by Merrilees and Miller (2008). In doing so, the paper provides some worthwhile contributions. It assists in addressing comments from Stuart and Muzellec (2004) who contend there are more rebranding failures than successes hence suggest analysis regarding “how” successful rebranding can be conducted is highly beneficial. Also, the research is based upon in-depth interviews with employees at all organisational levels - not just management level. Previous rebranding research has typically only examined managerial perspectives, with literature regarding employee involvement in rebranding “limited despite its importance” (Hankinson, Lomax, & Hand, 2007, p. 237) and employee roles “often overlooked” (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004, p. 480), hence providing a fruitful area for research (Lee, 2013). With corporate rebranding under-researched overall, within the nonprofit sector it “has received limited, if any, attention” (Khan & Ede, 2009, p. 209) and worthy of investigating given nonprofit organisations are “an integral and relatively large sector of many economies” (Ewing & Napoli, 2005, pp. 841-842). Transfer of marketing principles developed in the for-profit sector to the nonprofit sector has long been recognised (Kotler & Levy, 1969), however nonprofit organisations have traditionally struggled for funds and proposals to spend hard-earned funds on rebranding may be seen as problematic by many employees. Similarly, “values”, as opposed to profit/financial value, are a nonprofit organisation’s raison d'être (Hudson, 1995) with Stride and Lee (2007) determining that “values” play a key role in nonprofit branding. Therefore, examining the Merrilees and Miller (2008) framework (originally developed in relation to large for-profit organisations) in a nonprofit context is a worthwhile contribution. The paper also pioneers a change management perspective to examine corporate rebranding hence is an additional contribution.

Literature review

Corporate rebranding – why rebrand?

Whilst companies spend extensive time and effort developing their brand and associated image, there are various reasons why companies may subsequently rebrand. Corporate rebranding, as distinct to corporate branding, is a strategy typically used to signal a change of image (Hankinson et al., 2007; Stuart & Muzallec, 2004) and "refers to the disjunction or change between an initially formulated corporate brand and a new formulation" (Merrilees & Miller 2008, p. 538). It enables "developing a differentiated (new) position in the mind of stakeholders and competitors" (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006, p. 805).

Rebranding should be conducted for logical and rational reasons (Stuart & Muzallec, 2004) and only if the organisational change is "of sufficient magnitude to suggest the need for a fundamental redefinition of its identity" (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006, p. 810). Typical reasons to rebrand include mergers/de-mergers/acquisitions, structural, strategic or management change, new senior management, shifts in the marketplace, image updating, distancing from a poor image, new scope of operations, new organisational focus/vision, or competition (Baker & Balmer, 1997; Hankinson et al., 2007; Lomax & Mador, 2006; Stuart & Muzellec, 2004).

Once the decision has been made to rebrand, there is a need to determine the cost/benefits justifying the rebrand and "how and to what extent the corporate brand should be changed" (Merrilees & Miller, 2008, p. 538). Corporate rebranding is expensive (Gotsi & Andriopoulos, 2007) thus it is vital to ensure effective implementation.

Components of rebranding

Stuart and Muzellec (2004) suggest rebranding generally constitutes one or more of three components – name, logo (including colours) and slogan, with a continuum existing from evolutionary change involving only one component, to revolutionary change involving change to all three components. This perspective was later expanded by Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) who added ‘positioning’ whereby re-targeting and re-positioning were aimed at assigning a new meaning to the corporate brand and communicating new benefits to stakeholders.

Name change - name change is “one of the most commonly used methods to indicate a transition in identity” (Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006, p. 853). However, the name of an organisation is the main instrument by which an organisation communicates to stakeholders, hence name change is very risky (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006; Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). This is due to the values associated with an organisational name having been developed over a long time period and “suggests loss of all the values that the old name signifies” (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006, p. 804).

Logo change - changing logo design is a relatively quick and easy way to update corporate image (Müller, Kocher, & Crettaz, 2013) however care needs to be taken to ensure visual changes (including logos) are related to “substance” rather than simply to “trappings” (Baker & Balmer, 1997). Logos possessing high recognition are typically very natural, very harmonious and only moderately elaborate (Henderson & Cote, 1998).

Slogan change - is less risky, less costly and quicker to change than either an organisational name or logo and strongly assists the positioning of the organisation.

Positioning - brand positioning may change or stay the same during a rebranding exercise (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). Customers take considerable time and resources to acquire and nurture, thus any repositioning must "'be sensitive to the existing customer base" (Ewing, Fowlds, & Shephard, 1995, p. 19) so as not to lose existing customers.

Employee involvement

Rebranding will involve and/or effect employees. A "corporate brand personality can be defined in terms of the human characteristics or traits of the employees" and thus "reflect the values, words and actions of employees, individually and collectively" (Keller & Richey, 2006, p. 75). Hence, for a successful corporate rebranding to occur, employees need to be moved from their existing mindset/culture to another based upon re-alignment to the new corporate brand values (Gotsi, Andriopoulos, & Wilson, 2008).

Brand meaning is constructed/contested in all interactions between stakeholders (including employees and management) (Motion, Leitch, & Brodie, 2003) "whose expectations and interpretations may differ from one another" (Lee, 2013, p 1127). Thus, when rebranding, employees' identity can be challenged. Corporate brands are not just a cultural symbol influencing self-identity, but also offer a bond of identity for employees (Basu, 2006). Rebranding can introduce new meanings and these new meanings need to be accepted by employees; with all employees "moved from one mindset/culture to another" (Merrilees & Miller, 2008, p. 538). Similarly, introducing change into organisations is an adaptive process requiring time for employees to learn new ways of thinking and doing (Mintzberg, 1994).

The actual behaviour of employees is a good indicator of long-term acceptance to the brand. Employees therefore need to live the brand (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003; Hankinson, 2004; Ind & Bell, 2000) and vision of the organisation and utilise it in their daily behaviour and actions (de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001; Free, 1999). This is particularly important in service industries where employees often play a key role in providing the product to consumers (de Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998; de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003). Management need to be aware of "potential internal resistance" and develop a "well-structured change management program to gain buy-in" (Merrilees & Miller, 2008, p. 538). Within the nonprofit context, Khan and Ede (2009) consider resistance from employees a key barrier to rebranding. Considering the key role employees play in brand delivery, current research lacks examination of rebranding from an employee perspective (Melewar, Gotsi, & Andriopoulos, 2012).

Differences between for-profit and nonprofit organisations – do they affect rebranding?

Marketing theory was originally developed in relation to for-profit organisations, but from the late 1960's researchers began suggesting the relevance of marketing to the nonprofit sector (e.g. Kotler & Levy, 1969; Kotler & Zaltman, 1971, Shapiro, 1973). Marketing subsequently became accepted as transferable to the nonprofit context (Drucker, 1990; Kotler & Andreasen, 1996). Indeed, Andreasen and Kotler (2003, p. 11) suggested that "marketing and marketing skills inevitably must play a more central role" within nonprofit organisations. This is becoming more relevant considering that nonprofit organisations operate in increasingly competitive and dynamic environments (Blery, Katseli, Tsara, et al. 2010; Costa, Ramus, & Andreaus, 2011) with "increasing demands to become more efficient and effective" (Ridder et al. 2012, p. 605). Thus, managers of nonprofit organisations should utilise marketing techniques where appropriate.

Relative to for-profit organisations however, nonprofit organisations are "more complex" (Anheier, 2000, p. 6) and possess "unique organisational characteristics … which make them different from their commercial counterparts" (Sullivan Mort Weerawardena, & Carnegie, 2003,

p. 80). This complexity and uniqueness may have the result that managers “underestimate the unique challenges of managing nonprofit organizations” (Silverman & Taliento, 2006, p. 37). Key differences between for profit and nonprofit organisations include: objectives (profit versus societal benefit), culture (expenditure is perceived as investment versus expenditure perceived as cost), performance measurement (financial based versus client satisfaction), management (university educated versus often industry experienced based), employees (paid versus paid/volunteer), funds (sales versus sales/donations/grants), governance (paid board versus voluntary board) (Andreasen & Kotler, 2003; Sargeant, 2005). Employees are a vital resource within all organisations, but the specific characteristics of nonprofit organisations make human resource management within the sector different to the for-profit sector (Ridder & McCandless, 2010). Due to these differences, direct transferability of marketing concepts developed in the for-profit context may be problematic, hence need to be researched within a nonprofit context to either establish direct generalisability, refinement or rejection. This is particularly relevant given the comment from Sargeant (2005, p. 2) that the “ethos” that drives usage of tools from the for-profit sector within a nonprofit context “can be radically different” hence any attempted transfer of practices can provide various challenges (Beck, Lengnick-Hall, & Lengnick-Hall, 2008). An additional complication within the nonprofit sector is that numerous employees mis-understand the practice of “marketing”, with many simply regarding marketing as advertising – hence expenditure of hard-earned funds (Kolb, 2008). The fundamental aspect of marketing being utilised to deliver the marketing/societal concept, and hence utilise all “7P’s” of the marketing mix, is not understood by many employees in nonprofit organisations. This issue sends out danger signs to nonprofit managers contemplating change, such as a rebranding, and signals that managers need to provide employees with strong information to assist buy-in.

A further complication when considering transferability of marketing techniques from the for-profit arena is that the nonprofit sector is rather broad, covering a range of roles from service provision, to social capital engagement to citizen engagement (Moulton & Eckerd, 2012). Hence, the complexity and differences of the nonprofit sector may in fact vary amongst different nonprofit sub-sectors. Thus, when examining the "nonprofit" sector – there needs to be recognition and appreciation that not all nonprofit organisations are the same. For example, a nonprofit charity that relies upon volunteers and donations will have different dynamics to a nonprofit health organisation that only utilises paid employees plus revenue from clients. Thus any learnings from marketing practices in one nonprofit sub-sector may not necessarily be relevant within a different sub-sector.

Whilst it is considered that marketing knowledge from the for-profit sector can have relevance within the nonprofit sector, the differences between sub-sectors makes usage unknown until examined – further justification for the research within this paper.

Principles of corporate rebranding

Whilst rebranding is recognised as appropriate in numerous circumstances, limited research exists regarding how to conduct successful rebranding (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). Similarly, Merrilees (2005, p. 205) considered that "there are not many explicit theories of brand evolution or rebranding" and consequently combined knowledge based on previous models proposed by Park, Jaworski and Mac Innis (1986), Goodyear (1996), McEnally and de Chernatony (1999), plus examination of rebranding at Canadian Tire. The result was development of a three-phase rebranding framework comprising brand vision (reformulation of the brand), brand orientation (employees live the brand) and brand strategy implementation. This framework was further progressed via development of six principles of corporate rebranding (Merrilees & Miller 2008) using learnings from four previously published rebranding case studies of for-profit organisations, namely Mazda (South Africa) (Ewing et al., 1995), LEGO group (Schultz & Hatch, 2003), Eircell/Vodafone (Ireland) (Daly & Moloney, 2004) and Canadian Tire (Merrilees, 2005). The six principles were supported by examination of rebranding at a for-profit organisation - Acton Leather Company (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). The Acton Leather case only involved evolutionary rebranding, as opposed to the more difficult revolutionary rebranding.

Principle 1 proposed by Merrilees and Miller (2008) involves satisfying the core ideology of the corporate brand and progressing the brand to ensure maintenance of relevance to current conditions. Principle 2 involves retention of some current brand concepts to construct a link from the existing, to the revised corporate brand. Principle 3 involves the requirement to meet the needs of both existing and new market segments. Principle 4 suggests organisations with high levels of brand orientation (delivered by communication, training and internal marketing) will likely deliver effective corporate rebranding. Principle 5 emphasises the need for high levels of integration and coordination of the marketing mix and Principle 6 stresses the use of promotion to inform all stakeholders of the revised brand.

Little explicit research has progressed these six principles into additional contexts such as the nonprofit arena. Indeed, based upon review of published literature, the first examination of the principles of corporate rebranding within a nonprofit setting was conducted by Miller and Merrilees (2013, p. 177). They acted as “consultants” and used action research to introduce corporate rebranding into a small disability services organisation reliant upon volunteers and sourcing funds from government tenders and donations. The researchers assumed that the principles of rebranding would be relevant, and the action research was structured around utilising the principles. Whilst useful, this research by Miller and Merrilees (2013, p. 178) concluded that further studies “in other types” of nonprofit organizations should be conducted, hence further justification for the current research.

Enablers and barriers to corporate rebranding

The three-phase rebranding framework (Merrilees, 2005) leading to the subsequent principles of corporate rebranding (Merrilees & Miller, 2008) served “as a platform” for a review of literature by Miller et al. (2014, p. 269) to determine enablers and barriers to corporate rebranding. Their review identified six major enablers and five major barriers to corporate rebranding. Some of these enablers and barriers were suggested to be present across all three phases of rebranding, whereas other enablers and barriers were suggested as only present in single phases of the rebranding process. Table 1 provides a composite of the principles of corporate rebranding and the enablers and barriers across the three phases.

Whilst examination of the principles of corporate rebranding in a specific nonprofit setting is the primary focus of this current research, an additional, secondary focus, will be to determine if any of the enablers and/or barriers suggested by Miller et al. (2014) based upon review of cases in a range of settings, are evident in the current case.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Research approach

As indicated above, the prime purpose of this current paper is to examine the process of corporate rebranding and determine the usefulness of the six principles of corporate rebranding (Merriless and Miller, 2008) in an entirely new setting not previously examined – a nonprofit community based organisation. A case study approach was selected as case studies are beneficial when holistic and in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991) - as is required to address the research purpose. “Case studies are the hallmark research approach for corporate rebranding studies” (Miller & Merrilees, 2013, p. 174). This current study examines a single case. For a specific amount of resources, single case studies enable greater analysis relative to multiple case studies (Gummesson, 2007). The case focuses upon the actions of both management and employees within the organisation as they progressed rebranding.

Case study research should utilise a rigorous research design (Johnston, Leach, & Liu, 1999) involving consideration of four key issues, namely the unit of analysis, selection of an appropriate case to study, what data to collect and how to collect the data. The research approach adopted for the current study was guided by the “rigorous research design” for case studies suggested by Johnston, Leach and Liu (1999, see pp. 205-210).

The case organisation

The case organisation was selected based upon the organisation having conducted rebranding within the past few years - allowing sufficient time to embed the change and determine results. The time also enabled management and employees to reflect upon, and crystallise their views regarding the rebranding process. The case organisation was selected to enable examination of revolutionary rebranding, perceived as more complex than evolutionary rebranding. The researchers were not involved in the original rebranding. The nature of the rebranding and the result were not known to the researchers at the time of case selection.

Illawarra Children's Services – was formed in 1981 as a community-owned nonprofit organisation based in the Illawarra region of south-eastern Australia to provide childcare services. The organisation originated "as an action group campaigning for the rights of families to affordable childcare" (Big Fat Smile, n.d. a, p. 2). The organisation competes against a mix of both for-profit and nonprofit organisations. Over time, the organisation outgrew its name, which became increasingly problematic. Firstly, the organisation expanded to operate not only within, but also outside the Illawarra geographic region. Secondly, the organisation expanded to offer services to not only children, but also to families, young adults and communities. Thirdly, the name was perceived as confusing, with many people assuming the organisation was a government (child support) agency, with associated institutional connotations. Apart from the decision to change name for these reasons, the organisation also wanted to connect with the changing market place, including Generation Y who were now typically becoming the main decision-makers within the target market. With assistance from external consultants, revolutionary rebranding was conducted during 2012 involving changes to the name, logo and strapline. The new name ultimately chosen for Illawarra Children's Services was Big Fat Smile.

Data collection process

Although corporate rebranding can be regarded as a change management process (Gotsi & Andriopoulos, 2007), minimal previous research has examined the process from such a perspective. The current research subsequently adopts a change management perspective as it has potential to deduce insights not available when more traditional perspectives to rebranding are taken. A discourse transformation framework based upon Foucault's (1991, pp. 56-57) four criteria for "detecting changes which affect discursive formations" has been chosen as it has previously been successfully used to examine marketing-oriented change management activities (see Author's own). Foucault's criteria are "displacement of boundaries", "the new position and role" of employees, the "new mode of functioning of language" and the "circulation" of the new discourse. These criteria enable identification of the actual change and the process involved, as well as the affect upon employees.

Following approval from the University Human Research Ethics Committee, prospective participants were provided with information sheets containing an outline of the research and examples of interview questions. Semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face individual interviews utilising open-ended questions were subsequently conducted with participants from all organisational levels and all functional departments until saturation occurred. Interview protocol questions were based upon addressing Foucault's (1991) criteria for detecting changes affecting discursive formations and the principles of corporate rebranding (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). Interview length ranged from 35-75 minutes. Following participants' consent, interviews were digitally recorded. For consistency, the same researcher conducted all interviews. Interview recordings were subsequently professionally transcribed. Transcripts were compared with the original digital recordings for transcription accuracy, then given to participants for checking and clarification of any issues. Additional data sources to assist with triangulation (Yin, 1994) and strengthen trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) included organisational documents, internet sites, newsletters, newspapers, marketing collateral and visual observation of the physical evidence of internal offices and service delivery centres.

Data analysis

Manual thematic analysis of transcripts utilised guidelines recommended by Creswell (2003, see pp. 191-195) and Patton (2002, see pp. 465-468) to identify emergent themes both within and across interviews. Transcripts were read and re-read over a period of weeks to assist data assimilation and data contemplation. Key data was highlighted and researcher thoughts and notes typed onto the transcripts. Following Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 58), analysis commenced based upon a "conceptual framework, list of research questions…", namely the Foucault (1991) discursive formation criteria and Merrilees and Miller (2008) principles of corporate rebranding. A list of various issues/topics was determined, evidence of each identified within individual transcripts and "cut and pasted" into a "master" document. Topics were abbreviated into codes, clustered if similar, high-level themes were then determined from the coded data and ultimately arranged for reporting under the principles of corporate rebranding (Merrilees and Miller, 2008). The "primary strategies" provided by Creswell (2003) were utilised to assist research validity.

In the following sections, comments from interview participants are indicated in *italics*.

Findings and discussion

Phase 1 – Brand Re-visioning - Principles 1-3.

Principle 1 – Satisfy core ideology of corporate brand, yet progress brand to remain relevant to contemporary conditions

This requires a mix of combining strong branding (core values) and innovation (investment and change). Principle 1 was supported as relevance was maintained to existing customers, coupled with progress to target Generation Y. Core values were maintained, with the aim to extend into a new geographical area as well as convey the core values in a new manner to the Generation Y target audience. Illawarra Children's Services changed its name to Big Fat Smile. Explaining the rationale for the new name, the Chair of the Board indicated *'we are about positive interactions. And with those interactions come smiles. Big fat smiles'.* This new name was regarded by the CEO as being a *'genuine message about our work, what we feel and what we deliver. It's abstract … powerful … sets us apart from competitors'.* Whilst the CEO recognised long-serving employees may have become attached to the original name, a key strategy to sell the new name to employees was to encourage them to *'understand its value to the company in a market increasingly populated by Gen Y parents who will be attracted less to conservatively branded services than their forbears and more to brands that speak overtly to their values'.* As well as the new name, a new logo/colours and tagline were developed. The tag line being "We believe in positive learning fun". Examples of the logo before and after the rebrand of Illawarra Children's Services (Big Fat Smile) are indicated in Figure 1.

Big Fat Smile also changed its language to relate more to the emerging target audience – Generation Y. Typical employee comments were – *'more common language rather than being tied up in a lot of sector jargon', 'much more conversational language', 'talking to them as a friend not as an institution, we also use some irreverent and cheeky language because we are about children'*. The new name and corporate look pushed the boundaries in a traditionally very conservative industry. Whilst the core values were maintained, branding became more contemporary to resonate with the new Generation Y target audience.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Principle 2 – Retain at least some brand concepts to build a bridge from existing to revised corporate brand.

Principle 2 was supported as key, valued organisational activities were continued, but under the umbrella of new corporate livery. Change in employee roles, coupled with the name change created issues for some employees. A frontline employee commented - *'initially it was a shock, but, as it was presented to us, I could understand and appreciate the background of where the name came from, so that helped me to feel positive about the name change'*.

Most employees have now *'gradually come around to being happy with it, but it's such a big change'*. The key issue was that the nonprofit, community owned segment of the childcare sector had traditionally been relatively conservative, so the name change and new way of operating were somewhat radical for many older employees. Corporate memory is a key component of an organisation. Maintenance of key aspects of the previous operations was vital to assist brand revision (Kapferer, 1997). The aim for management was to emphasise that the key values of strong childcare were not changing, but becoming more fun – *'its vibrant, it reflects more of who we are, and gives us a bit of licence to try new things and step outside the box'*.

Principle 3 – Meet needs of new market segments whilst also supporting existing brand segments.

Principle 3 was supported – a new name and vibrant colours were introduced to increase differentiation from competitors and also increase relevance with the target Generation Y. New customer segments often have different needs to original customers. Additional products and new communication methods with clients were introduced. For example, employees took photographs of children during their early learning activities and posted the photographs via a closed-system social media app to their tech savvy Generation Y parents – evidence and thus reinforcement for the parents that their children were safe and enjoying themselves, and communicated in a manner to which Generation Y relates.

Phase 2 – Attaining Internal Support / Stakeholder 'buy-in' - Principle 4.

Principle 4 – High level of brand orientation via communication, training and internal marketing.

Problems occurred internally within Illawarra Children's Services due to not fully gaining buy-in from all employees and/or involving employees in the rebranding process. In other words, problems occurred due to *not* employing Principle 4, hence, the need for Principle 4 was supported. Internal project leadership involved the CEO and one senior manager, with a consultant initially commissioned simply to develop a list of potential name options. The list of names was presented to the Board, but all names were rejected. Problems subsequently identified with this process were that a 'general' marketing consultant had been commissioned rather than a branding specialist. Also, the brief was simply to generate a list of potential new corporate names – with no accompanying logo design or colours – '*just come up with a name, and that process did not really work'*. Illawarra Children's Services subsequently commissioned a branding specialist to provide holistic rebranding ideas, not simply new name ideas – '*we started to work in a different way, we actually started to build the identity around the names… rather than just* *the name, we were actually starting to* [have] *a brand look and feel with each name'*. The ideas were subsequently presented to the Board, CEO and senior manager, with various ideas ultimately combined to provide the final results.

In determining recommendations for the rebranding, the consultants utilised *'some consultation broadly, across the organisation. Lots of talking to parents and children. Some to staff as well'*. 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). A key issue related to how much involvement senior management chose to give other managers and employees in the rebranding process. It was determined to only involve the Board, CEO, one senior manager, plus the external consultant. Development of a new name was confined to the consultants who brainstormed various ideas without involvement from Illawarra Children's Services employees.

Employees were notified rebrand was occurring – *'we were all told it was going to be exciting and new and we were like, wow, what's going to happen'* but no attempts at buy-in or employee involvement in relation to the specific brand name, logo and strapline were made. As indicated by a senior manager, there was *'very little'* employee involvement as *'it was decided to lock the process in, keep it tighter … there is actually quite a lot of science behind coming up with a name … I don't think people understand that … there truly isn't a way to consult people and really give them buy-in if their input isn't actually going to achieve what the objective is'*. This approach caused resentment amongst some managers and employees – exacerbated when the radical new corporate name was announced. A typical comment from a dis-affected manager was that next time *'there would definitely need to be more consultation'*. Similarly, as indicated by a frontline employee – *'It was very secretive. I don't think it was the best move … when we* *found out the name, some of them were just horrified, and how they weren't sort of involved in it'*. Other, less opposed views from various frontline employees regarding whether employees should have been involved in the rebranding process included comments that – '*its difficult to have* [everyone] *involved'* and *'I am glad it was left to whoever did it. The way they did it was all professional'*.

Phase 3 – Implementation - Principles 5 & 6.

Principle 5 – Integrate all elements of marketing mix in rebranding implementation.

Principle 5 was supported – new aspects were integrated into the marketing mix where appropriate. For example, physical evidence included new uniforms, newly painted company cars, and new marketing collateral.

Principle 6 – Promotion needed to inform all stakeholders of revised brand.

Principle 6 was supported - integrated promotion was utilised, although problems did occur due to mis-timing of some promotional delivery. Following selection of the rebrand by the Board, senior management briefings occurred prior to the formal announcement to employees in early 2012. Launch of the rebrand was conducted utilising a highly scripted formal presentation to employees. The history of the organisation was explained, leading to announcement of the new name and the rationale. The radically new name was a shock to many employees, but to others – *'once you heard the logic, its like yeah, you know, you can see where it's coming from'*. Employees received a letter, book, question and answer sheets and DVD. 'Brand ambassadors' were selected for each geographic location based upon *'their ability to positively influence their* *peers'* and received increased levels of instruction to assist employees with understanding and accepting the change. A key issue communicated was that the fundamental organisational values were not changing. The geographically diverse location of operations and the nature of the services meant that not all employees could attend the launch event, held in the local arts precinct. The same day as the formal presentation, employees as well as customers received letters in the post. A problem however was that customers in some geographic locations received their letters before employees – *'staff were upset that parents had received the information before they had'*.

Whilst the change process within Big Fat Smile was in some ways problematic and could have been 'sold' better to employees, a senior manager indicated – *'we couldn't imagine that there would be so much resistance … I think we had to go through the controversy to get something as good as we got … we could have gone softer and we wouldn't have had the issues, but we wouldn't have got such a great result'*. As noted by the CEO, *'if we had the opportunity again, we would have channelled more resources into prepping our ambassadors and local workplace leaders … for example, more question and answer sheets, more communications, more materials made available to people to, not only be able to speak about the brand in a way that gave them comfort, but also, reinforcing the message about why, both in terms of process and in terms of outcome'*.

Identification of enablers of corporate rebranding

Strong leadership (Multi-phase) - The CEO was regarded as a strong, highly driven, innovative and conscientious person dedicated and committed to seeing success of the rebranding. Despite initial issues with the rebranding as noted above, the strong CEO leadership enabled the initial issues to be overcome and the rebranding to ultimately be successful. Hence, this enabler was strongly present across all three phases.

Developing brand understanding (Phase One) – research should be conducted to develop a situation analysis to assist rebranding. Little formal research was conducted by Illawarra Children’s Services, with most of the initial information utilised to initiate the rebranding basically being knowledge already known by the people involved in the rebrand. Hence, this enabler was only weakly present.

Internal branding activities (Phase 2) - as noted in the discussion of Phase 2 Principle 4 above, there were some problems with gaining buy-in from employees. Hence, this enabler was only weakly present.

Continuity of brand attributes (Phase 2) - as noted in Phase 1 Principle 1 above, core values were maintained, with the aim to extend the organisation to new geographical regions and Generation Y. Maintenance of the core brand attributes also assisted stakeholder buy-in during Stage 2. Hence, this enabler was strongly present. Whilst Miller at al. (2014) suggest this enabler relates to Phase 2, based upon the current research in this specific setting, the findings suggest that this enabler also relates to Phase 1.

Stakeholder coordination (Phase 3) and *Integrated marketing program (Phase 3)* – as noted above in relation to Phase 3 Principles 5 and 6, a range of marketing mix elements were utilised to implement the rebrand and inform stakeholders. Thus, these enablers were strongly present but not implemented to an optimum level.

Identification of barriers of corporate rebranding

Autocratic rebranding approach (Multi-phase) - As noted above, the CEO was a strong leader committed to driving the rebranding. A decision was made by the organisation to involve relatively few personnel in the initial (Phase 1) aspects of the rebranding process. Whilst this could be regarded as containing elements of autocratic leadership, the decision was made in the interests of timeliness, efficiency and information security, ahead of the 'teaser' television advertising campaign and ultimate public announcement. Thus, whilst there was evidence of low level autocratic leadership during Phase 1, the subsequent Phases 2 and 3 involved more stakeholders as appropriate to achieve buy-in and implement the rebranding. Based upon this specific case, this suggests that a certain level of autocratic leadership in the initial Phase 1 is not necessarily a barrier.

Stakeholder tensions (Multi-phase) - During Phase 1, some stakeholder tensions were identified amongst various senior and middle management who were not invited to participate in the planning of the rebranding. During Phase 2, some employees become upset when informed of the rebranding activities, with buy-in somewhat problematic. During Phase 3, tension also occurred amongst some employees when they discovered that some clients received details of the rebranding before themselves. Thus, there was evidence of a low level of stakeholder tension barrier across all phases. However, this was not sufficient to prevent the rebranding.

Narrow brand re-vision (Multi-phase) - The brand re-vision incorporated core ideology of the original brand, plus a broadening to incorporate the new conditions. Thus, there was no evidence of this barrier within the current research.

Inadequate research (Multi-phase) - Whilst only a relatively small amount of research was conducted to assist the rebranding, it was sufficient to enable the rebranding to occur. Thus, there was no evidence of inadequate research.

Inadequate customer consideration (Phase 2) – Potentially linked to barriers of 'stakeholder tensions' and 'inadequate research', there was strong consideration of external customers, particularly Generation Y, however there was some existence of a lack of involvement of employees, but insufficient existence to affect success of the rebranding.

Results of the rebranding

Measuring results of corporate rebranding can be difficult however Miller et al. (2014, p. 270) suggest three indicators of rebranding success – "increases in measures of business success", "whether the case achieved the stated objectives" and "strong, positive references". Based upon these indicators, the rebranding within Illawarra Children's Services can be considered as ultimately successful. From a financial perspective, as indicated by a senior manager – *'a lot of our marketing measurements have increased* [thus suggesting] *it has been successful'*. During calendar year 2012 when the rebranding was implemented, Big Fat Smile generated A$17million. Revenue increased by 47% to A$25million in calendar year 2013 via increased child enrolments (Big Fat Smile, n.d. a). Revenue increased a further 25% in 2014 (Big Fat Smile, n.d. b). The new name is distinct and gets employees noticed at external industry meetings, and has enabled the organisation to more easily progress its growth strategy of opening new centres outside the local Illawarra geographical region. Most existing employees who had initial reservations regarding the rebranding appear to have acclimatised to the new organisation. A senior manager indicated that, *'by and large, over time, staff have come to feel less threatened* *by the name and become more accepting of the name'*. No customers were lost due to the name change. In regards to using a consultant, senior managers stated that *'I don't think it could possibly have been done in-house … its a specialist thing'* and if done in-house *'we would never have got a name like Big Fat Smile, as catchy and as memorable'*.

Managerial implications

The case study provides some key lessons and learnings for managers. Due to the infrequency of rebranding, an organisation will typically not possess relevant in-house rebranding knowledge. Problems occurred initially within Illawarra Children's Services when management tried to utilise in-house personnel with little if any rebranding experience, coupled with minor input from a generalist marketing consultant. Nonprofit organisations are characterised by tight rein upon expenditure, so this initial attempt to do things in-house was not surprising. However, employment of external rebranding specialist consultants to assist with the rebranding process is preferable. This finding supports Kaikati and Kaikati (2003) that senior management should utilise external brand consultants. Corporate rebranding, particularly revolutionary rebranding is a major undertaking and requires appropriate experience, knowledge and project management. Management often underestimates the demands and the intricacies of the process.

Whilst adherence to only four of the Merrilees and Miller (2008) principles of rebranding was identified in the case, all six principles of corporate rebranding were supported within the case study. This is because problems were identified which would not have occurred if the other two principles had indeed been utilised. The main problems in the rebranding process were due to not fully gaining early buy-in from employees, i.e. not adhering to Principle 4. Also, problems occurred in some locations due to mis-timing of promotional activities to announce the rebranding, i.e. not adhering to Principle 6. Thus, the problems in rebranding within Illawarra Children's Services would not have occurred if all six principles of corporate rebranding espoused by Merrilees and Miller (2008) were utilised correctly.

Whilst the principles of rebranding (Merrilees & Miller, 2008) have thus been shown to be transferable and relevant within this specific nonprofit context, the findings do indeed highlight that adherence to the principles could in fact be more important in a nonprofit context – this is due to the strong "ethos" that drives nonprofit employees and is particularly relevant in relation to Principle 4 (attaining internal support). There is a difference between "buy-in" and "involvement". Buy-in implies acceptance, whereas involvement implies being active in the rebranding process. Initial buy-in, and subsequent maintenance of buy-in from employees is crucial. Involvement can assist in gaining buy-in, but buy-in can also occur with employees not actually involved – employees may be happy for other people to conduct the rebranding activities. Management needs to make a value judgement regarding when and how to gain buy-in, and who to involve in the rebranding process. The more people involved, the more ideas, but the more cumbersome to manage. A trade-off is required between involving employees in the development stages versus potentially upsetting employees by not involving them, or indeed involving them but then subsequently not accepting their ideas. Thus, regular rebranding progress updates should be provided to employees to maintain buy-in and keep employees informed. These updates can be provided to employees via regular employee meetings and electronic or hard copy newsletters.

Closely associated and linked to the principles of corporate rebranding (Merrilees & Miller, 2008) are suggested enablers and barriers (Miller et al., 2014). The principles provide a useful guide to help managers deliver a successful corporate rebranding. Awareness of the enablers to assist deliver the principles, and awareness of barriers to avoid are also considered useful for managers.

Conclusions

The current study provides various research contributions. Firstly, the study extends explicit examination of the principles of corporate rebranding proposed by Merrilees and Miller (2008) to a new context – a specific sub-sector of the nonprofit sector. The nonprofit sector plays a vital role within society, so examination of the potential usage of the principles of corporate rebranding within this new context is a valuable contribution, particularly given the various differences between the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. When developing their principles of corporate rebranding, Merrilees and Miller (2008, p. 549) stated that generalisation of the principles "entails testing with further research". We now know that these principles of rebranding have merit within the specific area of the nonprofit sector examined and hence outside the original context upon which they were based (namely large, for-profit, multinational organisations operating in Europe and Africa, plus organisations in North America). This current research is amongst the first known research to explicitly progress examination of the "six principles" within a nonprofit context. The first known research was conducted by Miller and Merrilees (2013) in relation to a small disability services organisation (reliant upon volunteers and sourcing funds from government tenders and donations). Given the broad scope of the nonprofit sector, the current research contributes by examining a vastly different nonprofit organisation operating within a different market dynamic hence contributes by responding to

Miller and Merrilees (2013, p. 178) for further studies “in other types” of nonprofit organizations. The research also responds to the recommendation from Fetscherin and Usunier (2012, p. 746) for “‘extending corporate branding [research] to non-profit organizations”.

Previous branding/rebranding research has tended to be conceptual (Kärreman & Rylander, 2008), and addressing the needs of practitioners is a major issue for marketing academics (Lee & Greenley, 2010). Hence, the second contribution of this study is assisting determine “what works best in practice” (Gotsi & Andriopoulos, 2007, p. 343). The research identified aspects of the rebranding activity that did not work as planned - non-use of external specialist branding consultants, issues with gaining employee buy-in/involvement - hence pitfalls to avoid. The third contribution is the exploration of the real-life experiences of employees of all levels within organisations, not just senior management, thus responding to Melewar, Gotsi and Andriopoulos (2012, p. 606) for “research that examines how individuals affect corporate branding”. This is of particular relevance within the nonprofit sector where employees tend to have a stronger attachment to organisational mission and thus a different “ethos” than employees within for-profit organisations. The research indicated that some employees were very upset with the manner in which the rebranding was conducted – further evidence that Principle 4 in particular is of vital relevance within rebranding of nonprofit organisations. This contribution also responds to the comment from Merrilees and Miller (2008, p. 549) that developing greater understanding of brand buy-in by employees is a “fruitful” area of research. The paper identified the complex management judgements that need to be made regarding how and when to develop employee “buy-in”, as well as the separate but inter-twined issue of employee “involvement”.

A fourth contribution was examination of corporate rebranding via use of a change management perspective utilising a framework based upon Foucault’s (1991, pp. 56-57) criteria for “detecting changes which affect discursive formations”. This pioneering approach to examining corporate rebranding enabled generation of worthwhile insights from employees – the key stakeholders in delivering upon the organisational mission. This framework enables solicitation of insights from respondents perhaps not possible if more traditional approaches to rebranding research are utilised.

This paper examined the rebranding of a community-owned nonprofit organisation operating in a mixed market within an Australian setting. The findings contribute to the general corporate rebranding literature as well as the nonprofit specific literature. Given the dearth of examination of real-life organisations that have conducted rebranding, future research could continue examining the utility of the principles of corporate rebranding (Merrilees & Miller, 2008) in other organisations of varying sizes, operating in various industries in various countries.

Corporate rebranding is a key strategic decision that many organisations will need to make at one or more stages during the organisational life cycle and needs to be conducted successfully, for survival. The principles of rebranding (Merrilees & Miller, 2008) provide management with a useful guide to increase efficiency of the rebranding process. This can also be assisted by management awareness of the various enablers and barriers to corporate rebranding (Miller et al., 2014). A key challenge for academia is to make practitioners aware that these principles, plus associated enablers and barriers exist.

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Table 1. Principles of corporate rebranding and associated enablers and barriers

Source: Adapted from Merrilees & Miller (2008) and Miller et al. (2014)

	Phase 1 – Re-visioning the corporate brand	***Phase 2 – Achieving stakeholder buy-in to the revised corporate brand***	***Phase 3 – Corporate rebranding strategy implementation***
	Principle 1 - Satisfy core ideology of corporate brand, yet progress the brand to remain relevant to contemporary conditions. ***Principle 2*** - Retain at least some brand concepts to build a bridge from existing to revised corporate brand ***Principle 3*** - Meet needs of new market segments whilst also supporting existing brand segments.	***Principle 4***- High level of brand orientation via communication, training and internal marketing.	***Principle 5*** - Integrate all elements of marketing mix in rebranding implementation ***Principle 6*** - Promotion needed to inform all stakeholders of revised brand
Enablers	Strong rebranding leadership		
	Developing brand understanding		
		Internal branding activities	
		Continuity of brand attributes	
			Stakeholder coordination
			Integrated marketing program
Barriers	Autocratic rebranding approach		

	Stakeholder tensions		
	Narrow brand re-vision		
	Inadequate research		
		Inadequate customer consideration	

Figure 1. Illawarra Children's Services / Big Fat Smile 'before and after' logos.

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