Chapter

INTERNAL DEMARKETING AMONGST ORGANISATIONS EMERGING FROM FINANCIAL CRISES

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ABSTRACT

This chapter uses fresh qualitative data to explore experiences of Internal Demarketing (ID) within organisations which had suffered financial crises as a result of either macroenvironmental or microenvironmental factors. By considering how demarketing theory and extant Internal Marketing literature can inform a reconceptualization of ID, it analyses emerging themes which suggest at least a perception amongst employees that ID has been deployed with organisational intent. By focusing on two case studies drawn from a much larger project, and by using publicly available information on the organisations and participants' contextualisations, it suggests that, on the balance of probability, ID is undertaken with organisational intent in at least some instances, and this is more likely amongst organisations seeking to emerge from financial crises. Moreover, constituent forms of ID are identified and their characteristics unpacked.

Keywords: internal marketing, internal demarketing, demarketing

INTRODUCTION

Internal demarketing (ID) is a recently recognised phenomenon in which an organisation markets itself badly to its employees. In identifying the phenomenon for the first time, Vasconcelos (2008) proposed that ID is an unintentional consequence of botched internal

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marketing (IM) – an organisation attempting to make itself more attractive to its internal audience through its values and communications but failing to such an extent that the reverse becomes true. However, recent empirical research (Brown, Dey, Wäppling & Woodruffe-Burton, 2019) has raised the possibility of IM being used by some organisations intentionally to differing extents towards segments of their workforces, thereby lowering the attractiveness of the organisation to some employees. This chapter begins by revisiting the theoretical debate on IM, before analysing the characteristics underpinning the initial conceptualisation of ID, placing them within the broader context of demarketing theory, and deliberating over the applicability of their features – and particularly intent – to the context of organisations and their workforces. To do this, fresh empirical data is used, drawing on semi-structured phenomenological interviews seeking a 'bottom-up', employee perspective within several economically developed countries. These suggest at least partial organisational intent behind some instances of internal demarketing, and that the phenomenon appears much more prevalent amongst organisations seeking to recover from financial crises. These include macroenvironmental events such as the 2007-9 Financial Crisis and the accompanying downturn in consumer confidence, and microenvironmental events such as attacks from competitors and the loss of major sales accounts.

Internal Marketing

As organisations become more sophisticated and successful in their marketing to prospects and customers, it is natural that they might seek to maximise the benefits of this expertise by targeting it at additional audiences of stakeholders, such as their employees. Whilst staff differ from customers inasmuch as they have limited ability to avoid the marketing advances of the organisation (Christopher et al. 1991), the central ethos of IM is that it is non-coercive, interactive and consensual and, as such, delivers mutual benefits for both the staff members and employer (Kotler & Levy, 1969). IM may occur within meetings, emails, staff competitions or incentives. It may take the form of notice board announcements and posters, casual dress codes, staff subsidies, informal canteens, mentoring or job shadowing. And these lists are far from exhaustive. Being a specialist form of Relationship Marketing, it seeks to create mutual value during the multiple 'touch points' at which two or more entities interact during their longitudinal journey. An employee who is subjected to accomplished and sincere IM is likely to feel valued, understood and respected by their employer, assuming the individual staff member is open-minded and receptive to such approaches. They are likely to perceive benefits such as increased job satisfaction and self-esteem, professional pride, feelings of professional fulfilment and belonging, security, camaraderie and comradeship. All these affective outcomes present themselves in fresh data collected and analysed for this chapter. Moreover, some of the policy makers interviewed (though admittedly a small minority) declared such outcomes alone as sufficient to justify the deployment of company resources. However, the pursuit of organisational benefits motivates almost all cases of IM adoption and is at the heart of the theoretical debate.

In transferring some of the benefits of traditional marketing from its external customer-facing context to its internal environment, a firm can leverage existing synergies for a perceived advantage (e.g., – Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne, 1991). Effectively, if its managers consider its existing marketing expertise, investment and operations as a fixed cost which it has already invested, and the targeting of these efforts at each stakeholder group to be an additional variable cost, then increasing the total audience scope must therefore reduce the cost per 'recipient' or audience member. Naturally, this only holds true if one assumes that some sort of commercial reward can continue to be harvested despite the turning inward of efforts. Those organisations undertaking IM activities as a secondary strategy simply because "we have already done the hard part" may not represent its most devoted philosophical adherents, but reflect a pragmatism underpinning most IM adoption.

A common motivation behind IM adoption is the need to recruit, satisfy and retain high quality staff (Berry, 1984; Glassman & McAfee, 1992; Quester & Kelly, 1999; Gounaris, 2006). A high staff churn rate necessitates a heavy investment in re-recruitment, unsettles those staff who stay, and risks alienating customers who crave some continuity from one encounter with the firm to the next. It is a marketing truism that it costs several times as much to recruit a customer than to retain one (Reichheld & Kenny, 1990), whilst Reinartz, Thomas & Kumar (2005) found that underinvestment in both areas damages Return on Investment more than overinvestment does, and that straying more than 10% either way from the ideal investment level yields no more than a 1% return. As many organisations view IM as a relocation of external marketing practices into an internal environment, it seems logical that they might also relocate such commercial considerations from external to internal stakeholder relationships. Naturally, this also makes the possibility of deliberately demarketing to staff appear highly fanciful at first sight, until we consider in more detail the segmentable nature of the workforce.

IM is invariably intended to improve staff performance levels (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991; Christopher et al. 1991; Ballantyne, 1997; Ballantyne, 2000). This may be achieved by enabling the recruitment and retention of better staff, removing the necessity to retain or recruit inferior staff, and by maximising the effectiveness of those in situ. The key strategy to achieve this is to orient staff towards the organisation's customers (Grönroos, 1981; George, 1990; Christopher et al. 1991; Ballantyne, 1997; Awwad & Agti, 2011; Day, 2012) by instilling a better awareness of, and empathy towards, customers and their concerns. For 'boundary spanners' – those employees such as salespeople who span the customer-firm divide – this may reflect the inescapable everyday reality of their roles. To others deep within the organisation, IM may need to address more entrenched insularity by encouraging all colleagues to treat each other as internal customers to whom service, value and respect are paramount, and to consider their own jobs as internal products (Berry, 1984; Berry & Parasuraman, 1991; Greene, Walls & Schrest, 1994; Ballantyne, 1997; Caruana & Calleya, 1998; Lings, 2004) to be aspired to, co-constructed and aligned to their identities.

By uniting staff from different departments and levels of seniority within organisations, IM helps to facilitate relational networks and interactivity (Varey, 1995; Voima, 2001; Lings, 2004). For example, an IM initiative may include a team bonding session off-site – a corporate 'away day' in which employees are teamed with colleagues from other functions and with whom they would usually have little contact, to work on a challenging problem – and this may raise awareness of what help and collaborative opportunities are available in previously overlooked parts of the organisation. As such, IM not only instigates an increased level of internal communications (Varey, 1995; Hogg, Carter & Dunne, 1998; Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000; Kale, 2012), both inter-departmentally and intra-hierarchically, but also encourages internal market exchange and research, facilitating knowledge transmission and the growth of organisational competencies (Ballantyne, 1997; Ballantyne, 2000; Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003; Gounaris, 2006; Lindner & Wald, 2011). A pertinent example of this is the US industrial giant, 3M, which invests heavily in nurturing interfunctionality to create a borderless environment in which innovation can flourish. In the late 1960s, a New Product Development Designer named Art Fry attended a seminar delivered by a scientist, Spencer Silver, from a different department. Such fluidity of organisational learning was central to 3M's ethos and consistent with an IM perspective. Although the weak adhesive invented by Silver seemingly had no logical application, Fry remembered the seminar some years later when, opening his hymn book at choir practice, the page markers fell to the ground. Realising the need to secure bookmarks with an adhesive strong enough to hold them in place but weak enough not to damage the page, his mind cast back to Silver's weak adhesive and, as a result, Post-It Notes were invented. The resulting product has been phenomenally successful in many countries and helped to raise awareness of the 3M brand amongst new markets and customers. Whilst 3M cannot have knowingly implemented IM (as their approach predated the concept of IM by over a decade), its organisational stance is entirely congruent with the emphasis on empowerment, integration and learning at the heart of IM. Perhaps tacitly, it had employed an IM mindset to streamline internal processes, integrate colleagues and discourage silo mentality (Reardon & Enis, 1990; Christopher et al. 1991; Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993; Varey, 1995; Ballantyne, 1997; Varey & Lewis, 1999; Ballantyne, 2000; Kelemen, 2000; Hume & Hume, 2014).

As we have seen so far, IM should act as an agent for organisational change (Reardon & Enis, 1990; Christopher et al. 1991; Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993; Varey, 1995; Varey & Lewis, 1999; Winston & Cahill, 2012). Indeed, after mergers and acquisitions, during times of flux, and when organisations are rebranding or entering a turnaround period, the efficacy of IM is usually unleashed. In an example arising from recent interview data, a manager within a "traditional, old school insurance company full of suits and ties" described how his organisation had merged with a "very go-ahead, informal telesales-type insurance company with colourful branding and young staff in polo shirts." The two companies' contrasting levels of formality and tradition needed to be reconciled or moderated within the resulting organisation, and it used a range of IM tactics to do this – corporate 'away days' and team bonding sessions, 'town hall meetings' in which senior managers communicated their vision, buddying and shadowing schemes in which silos were dismantled by interdepartmental mentoring, and training programmes expressing a commonality of purpose and organisational intent. Indeed, a key managerial motivation for the implementation of IM strategies is to manage the organisational culture (Gummesson, 1987; George, 1990; Piercy & Morgan, 1991; Keleman & Papasolomou-Doukakis, 2004) and motivate staff towards the achievement of organisational goals (Grönroos, 1981; Berry & Parasuraman, 1991; Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993; Conduit & Mavondo, 2001).

Whilst IM has never been proposed as a panacea for all organisational ills, the extant literature examining it and proposing its applications is relatively utopian and uncritical. The exception to this is Hales (1994), a Human Resources Management academic who resented IM being used as a conduit for, or a constituent of, Human Resources strategy (Collins & Payne, 1991; Hales, 1994), arguing that it was either trespassing on the rightful terrain of HRM or simply rebadging well established HRM practices in a flash of intellectual gimmickry. The literature usually focuses on the organisational benefits, predominantly in terms of a more motivated and productive workforce which is more understanding of, and aligned towards, its customers and therefore able to generate commercial rewards. Although most seminal sources dedicate a paragraph or two to the benefits which may be enjoyed by employees, these considerations are almost always secondary and a means to an end. As a result, the literature is dominated by top-down, organisational, commercial perspectives at the expense of bottom-up, employee-oriented, relational perspectives. This seems at odds with the very ethos of IM and its situatedness within the Relationship Marketing paradigm (Christopher et al. 1991) which bestows 'relational' rather than 'transactional' values (Grönroos, 1981). It also contradicts the accepted distinction between IM and HRM which maintains that only IM works independently of contractual leverage and coercion (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993) – a distinction likely to be contested by HRM commentators - thereby undermining the very legitimisation of IM as a separate field. IM is dialectical and strives for consensual exchange (Voima, 2001) through reward and referent power rather than the imposition of top-down diktat through legitimate or coercive power (French & Raven, 1959). In extreme cases, IM strategies built upon little or no employee input may be rejected or derided by staff, whose alienation may result in 'brand saboteur' behaviours and resentment (Wallace, de Chernatony & Buil, 2013).

DEMARKETING

The concept of demarketing – as counterintuitive as it may at first seem – was introduced by Kotler & Levy (1969) and is the outcome of strategies and tactics which reduce demand for products or services (Mark & Brennan, 1995), rather than increasing it (Bradley & Blythe, 2014). Although subsequent development of the concept has been patchy, Medway, Warnaby & Dharni (2010) broadened it to include reductions in demand for places, in addition to brands and organisations, whilst Wright & Egan (2000) noted demarketing's potential in moderating societal behaviours. In recent years, the concept has been partially incorporated into wider theoretical debates, such as those surrounding sustainability and environmentalism, and marketing's role in driving these (Sodhi, 2011; Armstrong Soule & Reich, 2016). Used by marketers to counterbalance the lack of price-sensitivity when discouraging consumption or over-consumption of deleterious products (Lowe, Lynch & Lowe, 2016), it has helped to nudge populations towards more healthy drinking habits (Burton, Dadich & Soboleva, 2013) and away from smoking (White & Thomas, 2015; Chauhan & Setia, 2016). It has also been highly instrumental in discouraging the purchase of single use plastics (Eagle, Harmann & Low, 2016) and tourism within environmentally sensitive regions (Armstrong & Kern, 2011), amongst others. Nonetheless, the concept of demarketing is under-recognised by practitioners and educators and remains niche.

Six main categories of demarketing were proposed by Bradley & Blythe (2014), and these considered not only the outcomes of the marketing actions, but the intent underpinning them. The broad term, *general demarketing*, was used to describe an intentional attempt to reduce demand for something across all customer or prospect types (Skinner, 2014). As such, it does not target a specifically segmented audience, and is transparent in its intent. In synchromarketing products and services are marketed when supply is able to fulfil a higher demand than is present but not when demand is much higher than supply levels (Martinez-Ruiz, 2014). By reacting to the peaks and troughs of demand and attempting to moderate their effects and align them more closely with supply, it seems unlikely that many organisations would actively demarket for phases, but rather passively choose not to market, thereby maintaining a useful level of customer desire for when supply increases. If this is the case, it can barely be considered demarketing.

Unintentional demarketing may share its outcomes with general demarketing, but none of its intent, being the unwanted result of well-meant but poorly designed or mismanaged marketing – it is when a reduction in demand is achieved despite an increase in demand having been the aim (Kirchner, 2014; Madichie, 2014). As we shall explore later, the first conceptualisation of ID (Vasconcelos, 2008) applied these conditions to the internal market, and we shall debate this at length. *Counter-marketing* is the intentional demarketing, especially by government bodies, of products, services or behaviours which may be harmful or undesirable (Boddy, 2014). Campaigns to discourage drink-driving, alcohol and substance misuse fall into this category. Occasionally an organisation may wish to demarket its own products for a period of time for ethical reasons, as was the case when the adventure clothing manufacturer, Patagonia, asked people to forego new clothes purchases for a day in favour of repairing and recycling them, thereby protecting the earth's resources. Naturally, by communicating its ethos of sustainability, Patagonia may have attracted incremental demand over a longer timescale through what was cause-related marketing, and this potentially opens a debate over whether such 'sprat to catch a mackerel' demarketing is really covertly intentioned traditional marketing.

Ostensible marketing is the intentional attempt to decrease customer demand whilst giving the outward impression that one wishes to increase it (Croft, 2014; McKechnie, 2014). It seems perhaps likely that the opposite approach - ostensible demarketing, or appearing to intentionally dissuade custom whilst surreptitiously attracting it (Kotler & Levy, 1969) – could have broader commercial applications, especially for aspirational brands which seek an aloofness, or from those postmodern brands which wish to convey a spirit of 'sprezzatura' by being cool without appearing to try. *Selective demarketing* may also be covert but seeks a reduction in demand only from a targeted section of an organisation's customer base whilst protecting its sales amongst other, more valued segments (Kotler & Levy, 1969; Bradley & Blythe, 2014; Farquhar, 2014; Tan, 2014). Indeed, by demarketing its products or services to a customer segment deemed less 'desirable', a brand may increase its attractiveness to others in a manner which goes beyond a traditional understanding of segmented marketing. In the wake of 2007-9 Financial Crisis, many of the UK's high street banks made their financial products less attractive to casual savers and domestic mortgagees as they wished to reorient their investments. To understand whether this constitutes demarketing – it may be considered a simple and innocuous case of targeting whichever segment is more profitable – one must have a clear idea of the level of organisational intent and the extent to which customers have been purposely 'sacked', but such intentions are invariably obscured. After all, which CEO would admit to trying to get rid of poorer customers? Perhaps selective demarketing, where it occurs, is more often achieved through an intersection of ostensible marketing and selective marketing – a hybrid form of manipulating demand which allows firms to claim legitimately that they have courted one customer segment, rather than stating how other segments were, by default, a neglected by-product of such a strategy. It seems likely that this obfuscation, or at least a blurring of boundaries, has deterred theorists from critically challenging Vasconcelos' (2008; 2011) conceptualisation of IM as a form of unintentional demarketing, and we turn to this question next.

INTERNAL DEMARKETING

Vasconcelos (2008) introduced the concept of ID, providing a list of managerial and organisational antecedents, identifying actions which constitute ID, and explaining their possible consequences. He suggested that ID is inadvertently botched IM brought about by organisational incompetence, lack of foresight, bad planning or insufficiently skilled managers, amongst other factors. As such, his conceptualisation of ID was as a form of unintentional demarketing situated within the organisation, but perhaps even stronger than most forms of unintentional demarketing as it not only lacked organisational intent but actually represented the opposite outcomes to those intended by the organisation. In other words, he saw ID not as a passive and unintentional form of inattentive strategic drift, but as the unwanted outcome of an active and well-intentioned organisational strategy.

The deleterious outcomes of ID identified by Vasconcelos (2008; 2011) include a reduction in organisational identity amongst employees. As IM is intended to positively differentiate an employer from its rival organisations in the minds of staff, damaging this identity represents a commodification of the firm which could, through increased employer-employee psychic distance, erode staff loyalty, lower staff barriers to exit and result in an unhealthy staff churn rate which impacts upon recruitment costs and continuity of organisational knowledge. He suggested that ID would impact negatively on employees' perceptions of the organisation and of their colleagues, which would be likely to produce several outcomes running against the aims of IM, such as discouraging interdepartmental and interpersonal collaboration (thereby possibly hindering innovation and organisational entrepreneurship), laying the foundations of a silo mentality, and removing a motivation for staff to treat each other as internal customers worthy of high levels of service. It also seems almost certain to undermine staff morale, thus stimulating a damaging cycle in which negative affect and behaviour continuously feed each other. The outcomes suggested are likely to trigger a decline in productivity at both an organisational and individual level, and a workforce which is less oriented towards its market and less focused on its customers and stakeholders.

The symptoms of ID suggested by Vasconcelos (2008) included an environment of distrust amongst colleagues and between staff of differing hierarchical levels, low levels of staff commitment towards the organisation and each other, and an increase in employee dissatisfaction, all in direct contradiction to IM's aims. If one is to accept his conceptualisation of ID as the unwanted outcomes of botched but intentional IM approaches, rather than a passive drifting lacking in any organisational intent, a firm's managers are likely to be alert to such negative symptoms as they should be actively monitoring their internal environment for positive responses to their intended IM, and more likely to act quickly by initiating remedial actions. However, if one is to accept the possibility of ID evolving through neglect over a long time span, it is less likely that management would be vigilant to such negative symptoms, or ready and prepared to implement corrective strategies. Moreover, if IM is the use of existing marketing competencies internally (Christopher et al. 1991) and ID is to be considered an unintentionally botched form of IM (Vasconcelos, 2008), then it seems plausible that both IM and ID would be segmented, as segmentation of audiences is key to marketing to customers. Is it realistic to expect organisations to eschew segmentation in favour of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach when redirecting marketing efforts at their employees, given its dominance in other markets? If not, it would appear not as Crook & Combs' (2007, p.546) "rising tide that lifts all boats equally," but a phenomenon demanding a more nuanced exploration to ascertain if it affects certain employees differently to others.

A key strength of Vasconcelos' (2008) article, both to theorists and managerial practitioners, was his identification of seven antecedents of ID, which are considered here. The first of these was 'people devaluing', by which he meant not just the unconscious failure to value employees sufficiently, but also the rather more cognitive state of deprioritising the needs of internal stakeholders. This distinction is interesting, as it introduces a level of choice and willingness which, whilst not necessarily indicating active intent, appears to go slightly beyond passiveness and accident. The next antecedent, 'quality of working life unconcern' is similarly problematic and open to ambiguity. The word 'unconcern' conveys a passive, uncaring lack of regard for employees' happiness and welfare at work, and a willingness to neglect. However, if organisations seek to improve quality of working life in order to retain valued employees when staff retention is most desirable (e.g., – during times of economic growth), is it not therefore possible that an organisation could purposely worsen quality of working life during periods of redundancies and rationalisation, when demand for its 'job products' (Berry, 1981; Ballantyne, 1987) is much more inelastic in relation to their attractiveness due to employment insecurity and a declining number of alternative jobs? Moreover, if the 'quality of working life unconcern' is matched by an unconcern for the needs or satisfaction of commercial customers, it is likely to be an outcome of poor organisational direction or poorly motivated or trained managers, whereas if the regard for external customers' needs remains high but concern for employee needs is low, that appears indicative of a conscious prioritisation, or at least a mindset which is directly at odds with the philosophy of IM, thereby casting into doubt whether such unconcern could be an unintended result of IM.

The next two of Vasconcelos' (2008) antecedents of ID, 'lack of vision' and 'weak leadership', seem entirely consistent with any form of unintentional demarketing, although they may perhaps be considered supra-constructs encapsulating other, more specific, shortcomings. 'Patchy or non-existent communication' could possibly be an outcome, or at least the means by which an outcome is suffered, rather than purely an antecedent, and the term would have benefited from clarification given the range of constituent considerations – messages, media and symbolism, to name just a few – within communications. Likewise, 'psychological contract violation' and 'the contagion of distrust', whilst likely antecedents of ID, may also be outcomes or, indeed, both antecedents and outcomes iteratively fuelling each other.

It is worth noting that all Vasconcelos' (2008) identified antecedents are at managerial and organisational level. This presents two possible shortcomings. If IM takes a dyadic approach (Yang & Coates, 2010) to its 'internal customers' (Berry, 1981; Ballantyne, 1997) and, as a form of Relationship Marketing, must use not only 'organisation-to-customer' actions but also 'customer-to-organisation' and 'customer-to-customer' ones, then antecedents to both IM and ID should also occur at a staff level. Moreover, although different organisations react differently to external pressures – for example, some might react to a recession by rationalising their workforces and reducing headcount whilst others might seek to reassure, satisfy and retain staff, ready to attack the market when more favourable trading conditions emerge – it might be pertinent to consider the potential implications of external antecedents, such as financial crises. Such a research ambition is certainly problematic - and especially for the qualitative researcher whose purpose is not to prove correlation or causality - due to the extreme unlikelihood of executives declaring that their ID may have been intentional and a reaction to external pressures. After all, ID is seen as damaging to the organisation's performance and the wellbeing of staff. However, by placing an organisation's IM or ID within the broader context of its stated strategic responses to its external environment, it is sometimes possible to provide a 'smoking gun' – not to prove *beyond all reasonable doubt* that ID has been driven by organisational intent, but at least to make such a judgment *on the balance of probability*. An example of this was provided by Brown et al. (2019) in their study of ID within the UK Civil Service (i.e., – central government departments) since the 2007-2009 financial crisis. Although categorical proof of organisational intent could not be provided for the ID which surfaced unanticipatedly amongst interviews with many of the participants in a study of IM, by placing the organisation within the context of its austerity era Public Relations statements and publicly available policy documents, it was possible to demonstrate the high probability that ID was intentional. In the next section, we examine some of the findings from that study and other research conducted in the public and private sector and discuss the likelihood of organisational intent given the broader context available elsewhere.

REVISITING INTERNAL DEMARKETING THROUGH FRESH DATA

The Methodological Approach

This investigation of ID occurred in an unanticipated manner during a much broader study of IM, its dyadic interactions and its conceptualisation. As a key aim of the research was to redress the dominance within extant literature of top-down organisational perspectives and commercially driven analysis, it used numerous (n = 42) semi-structured phenomenological interviews of actors at varying levels of seniority and authority within IM campaigns – directors, managers and general members of staff. They represented an almost equal gender split and a wide range of age groups. An initial wave of participants was recruited from the researcher's contacts on Linkedin and interviewed at their work premises (with informed individual and organisational consent), off-site or via Skype. A further two rounds of participants were recruited through snowball sampling, so that around half of all interviewees were previously unknown to the researcher. Of these, some worked at the same organisations as earlier participants and some did not. A small number were retired or temporarily unemployed and, like some working participants, chose to reflect upon their experiences in one or more previous organisations. The working interviewees were employed in a mixture of SMEs, larger and international firms, public sector and third sector organisations. These were located within all nations of the United Kingdom, Ireland, The Netherlands, the United States, Canada, Germany, Belgium and Australia.

Transcriptions of recorded interviews were subjected to thematic analysis, and the scope of later interviews evolved to explore further interesting themes emerging from the earlier ones – hence the introduction of interviews specifically focused on ID part way through this process. Interviews in which ID was intended to be the focus were conducted at neutral venues or participants' homes, as per Fahie's (2014) process for undertaking sensitive qualitative research on topics such as workplace bullying. In all cases, participants' identities have been obscured. Complementary desk research of secondary, publicly available data was also undertaken to establish the broader organisational contexts (e.g., – if the employer was increasing or decreasing staff numbers, freezing wages, addressing a pension fund 'black hole', or implementing compulsory or voluntary redundancies). It must be reiterated that proving ID beyond reasonable doubt is not possible but making a judgment on the balance of probabilities is.

Case 1: Jack, the Retired Regional Sales Manager

To analyse the emerging and then recurring theme of ID, we shall examine the experiences two key participants on a case-by-case basis, before identifying thematic commonality between them.

In case 1, Jack was a retired Regional Sales Manager who had worked 18 years for a prominent motor manufacturer. His tenure had ended through compulsory redundancy a few years before he had planned to retire, as part of a restructuring exercise in which headcount was reduced through the use of outsourcing. Jack recalled his employer's long-term commitment to IM:

> "As far back as I remember, XXXX wanted to have a strong dialogue with staff. I think this was all members of staff, but certainly there was more emphasis on people like me who were representing the company and trying to push dealers to sell more."

Although he paints a very positive picture (at least initially), he immediately reveals that the organisation's IM is not one-size-fits-all but targeted more strenuously at 'boundary spanners' – those people dealing with external stakeholders. Naturally, this is not necessarily damaging or alienating, and could be commercially appropriate, but it certainly suggests a differentiated or segmented approach to IM which is overlooked in the extant literature and submerged beneath the mantra of Crook & Combs' (2007, p.546) "rising tide that lifts all boats equally." He explains one form of IM:

> "Over the years we had lots of trips to foreign production plants where we saw the vehicles being built. We would always run some sort of competition and the winning dealers would send their best salespeople and the dealer principal. We'd have a couple of days at a beach resort thrown in and it would be a chance to get to know dealers and other colleagues better and, well, I suppose humanise the relationship so that you could pull in favours like getting vehicles released urgently from the compound."

Evidently, the IM was aimed at nurturing interdepartmental collaboration (Christopher et al. 1991; Kelemen, 2000) and encouraging communication between staff (Varey, 1995; Kale, 2012) for commercial organisational benefits, and these themes continue into the organisation's other IM activities:

> "We had all sorts: regular product knowledge training sessions where we were taken off-site for a few days to a country hotel and got to drive all the latest vehicles; lunch events for the top salespeople to dine with the directors; job shadowing so that the youngsters could learn the tricks of the trade from the old timers; lots of email campaigns

> and charity fundraising events; we also had an MD near the end of my time who liked to have these 'town hall meetings', which were something I'd not heard of and an American thing, but basically he would stand on a box and brief staff about the latest company developments every month or so."

Jack described a range of IM media and methods (emails, meetings, briefings, training, team bonding sessions, hospitality, competitions), which vary greatly in levels of formality and style. He also introduced some of the perceived motivations or rationale behind his organisation's IM – the internal transfer of knowledge (Gounaris, 2006), internal communications (Varey, 1995; Kale, 2012), the building of relational networks and interaction (Varey, 1995; Voima, 2001; Lings, 2004), the dismantling of organisational silos (Christopher et al. 1991; Kelemen, 2000). So far, everything outlined by Jack corresponds with what the extant literature leads us to expect. However, he then provides a broader context which is potentially troubling:

> "About 2008 or 2009, I received a letter from the company pension trustees saying that there was a shortfall in the fund of about £50m – just in the UK – which seems a hell of a lot of money for a company which has so few staff in this country. It said that they had a plan to rectify this. Well, they had already closed the final salary scheme to new entrants, so how exactly could they rectify it? Kill off people before they retired? [Laughs] I think at that point, I knew what was coming, and sure enough, over the next couple of years, the last wave of people to go onto the final salary scheme started to go bump in the night [i.e., – disappear unexpectedly]. The earlier recruits appeared to be unaffected because many of them were in charge anyway, and the later recruits seemed to be unaffected because they were only on a stakeholder salary, but the last people onto the final salary scheme started disappearing for spurious reasons. You'd walk into the office one day and ask where someone was, and colleagues would answer in hushed tones that he'd left suddenly for fiddling expenses or having some sort of disagreement with management. This same wave of people would be passed over for promotions and singled out for lots of prolonged and unfair criticism in meetings. In effect, they were being bullied, harassed and pushed out of the company, and the only ones who got a pay-out [i.e., – compromise agreement] were those who could withstand this pressure longer than it was economically viable for the company."

In itself, the scenario Jack describes, though disappointing, is perhaps neither uncommon nor surprising. One must also consider the possibility that he has misread the perceived link between the pension shortfall and the staff departures, and even the actual reasons for the departures. However, he goes on to describe (without any prompting) a change in IM message and tone which is consistent with a reduced organisational desire to satisfy and retain certain staff:

> "About the same time, all the internal messaging went from "I'm ok, you're ok" to "work harder, be better, fit the new order, compete." Ok, maybe I'm making it sound a bit more sinister, but the tone changed from wanting us to feel at home to wanting us to aspire to the organisation. It was very sudden and pronounced. They started using different words like 'energy', 'flexibility', 'passion', 'ambition' and 'desire' where before they had spoken a lot about 'experience', 'relationships', 'continuity' and

> 'tradition'. It was quite pronounced. They also started using a much younger and Americanised style of speech or writing – quite slangy, and probably the way my kids would speak but not the way I would. I know some of my younger and newer colleagues were really into it, but it just alienated most of the people my age."

What Jack describes is not necessarily an intentional shift in IM but may simply represent a generational change which has occurred due to older marketers and Human Resources staff gradually being replaced by younger ones who adopt tones and messages which reflect their experiences of society. The change has certainly made the organisation less attractive for older staff and potentially increased the psychic distance between themselves and their employer, but there are four possible interpretations: (i) that it is accidentally caused by the generation gap and an evolution in working practices; or (ii) that senior managers in the organisation have purposely sought such a change to appeal more to younger, newer colleagues, or (iii) less to older colleagues, or (iv) both. Thus, what Jack describes may be (i) IM which unintentionally demarkets to his segment of employees; (ii) IM which intentionally prioritises a different employee segment; (iii) IM which intentionally deprioritises his segment relative to others or ID which intentionally targets it; or (iv) IM which intentionally deprioritises his segment relative to others and ID which intentionally targets it.

Whilst Jack's (possibly inaccurate) linking of the organisation's economic crisis to its IM strategies, and the background context which he provided, suggest that a form of ID might be useful to the firm in encouraging some unwanted or costly staff to leave before expensive voluntary severance schemes are deemed necessary, data from a much larger range of sources are required to give us more confidence in the concept of ID. This materialised during the course of the research as roughly a third of participants described other changes in IM tone, style or strategy which similarly reflected an environmental change in which reduction of the workforce became desirable to the organisation. The second case which we shall examine is from the UK Civil Service:

Case 2: Colin, the Former Civil Servant

Colin had worked as a region-based Civil Servant for around 25 years and attained a junior management grade when, in 2013, he was placed into performance management measures which eventually led to him accepting a voluntary severance package to leave the organisation. He describes some of the IM permeating the UK Civil Service from 2011 until 2016, and the reception it received from various employees:

> "One of the things I noticed is that they tried to make the top brass [senior management] seem much less formal and much more approachable. The Perm Sec [Permanent Secretary – UK head of Colin's government department] started putting out these internal blogs every week about what an ordinary weekend he had just had like everybody else and his reflections on work."

This seems a very admirable approach to IM, attempting to accentuate commonality between staff and management by demonstrating that they share common concerns, such as family and colleagues, although Colin's phrase, "*tried to make [them] seem*" expresses cynicism at what he may have considered a false self-portrayal. It certainly does not demonstrate the "*quality of working life unconcern*" constituent of Vasconcelos' (2008) ID. Colin continues:

> "They were obviously trying to change the culture of the Civil Service from this old-fashioned, 'old school tie' [i.e., – privately educated men in key positions], One Nation Conservative kind of mindset to something a bit more competitive and corporate. And of course, streamlined. Francis Maude [government minister in charge of the Civil Service] had said he wanted to reduce numbers greatly, and also said that he wanted a different culture."

Indeed he had, although not without contradiction. The government promised to appoint 300,000 civil service apprentices by 2020 without cutting current roles to achieve this (Cabinet Office, 2016), then stated that overall numbers should be reduced "to create space to allow for the recruitment of apprentices" by offering voluntary severance packages whilst telling those offered that future packages are likely to be substantially smaller – in effect, leveraging on the availability heuristic as a threat to achieve their means. Confusingly, Maude (2013) had posited that, although he desired cultural change, "you don't change the culture by trying to change the culture," so his stance towards IM was unclear. Colin noted that contradictory messages also undermined IM:

> "There was this idea running through the ethos of the Civil Service which they wanted us all to buy into, and that was the idea that we should all buy into each other's success. We should all try to help each other to do better and to be better, rather than just thinking about our own little side of the fence. And that was really reinforced time and time again in emails from Whitehall [HQ of the UK Civil Service], Perm Sec speeches at town hall meetings, and in other forms of communications."

So far so good. By encouraging staff to treat each other as 'internal customers' (Berry, 1981; Ballantyne, 1997), interacting more (Varey, 1995; Voima, 2001; Lings, 2004), transferring knowledge (Gounaris, 2006), and dismantling silos (Christopher et al. 1991; Kelemen, 2000), staff performance could be improved (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991), IM could change the organisation (Reardon & Enis, 1990) and the organisational culture could be managed (Gummesson, 1987; Piercy & Morgan, 1991) (should Maude find the idea viable). In all of the above respects, the UK Civil Service had 'textbook' IM rationale for their strategies. However, this was undermined by self-contradiction:

> "All the time that they were telling us to commit to each other's success, they were also targeting us, measuring our performances, against each other. So for example, if you were in the bottom quarter of staff against a certain bunch of measures at your annual appraisal, you would be placed in performance management. Only they called it "needing development," to make it sound more as though they were helping you to become a better, more fulfilled member of staff. And if you went into this category – which was all based on your line manager's subjective opinions of your work, by the way – you had to hit the new targets which they gave you otherwise you would get a series of warnings and be shown the door [i.e., – dismissed]. It's all over the place. They also tell you that you're now guaranteed five days' training. Well, we always were. So it's just being disingenuous, pretending to give us something that we'd not already got."

There is certainly a glaring contradiction here which explains Colin's cynicism and cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) in the face of his organisation's IM. In attempting to make the Civil Service conform to private sector expectations of competition and performance, it was placing staff into a 'rank and yank' exercise in which the lowest ranked, even if performing extremely well, would be punished. In reducing Civil Service headcount by one fifth between 2010 and 2015 – the five years of the Conservative-Liberal Coalition government focused heavily on implementing swingeing austerity measures to shrink the state – ministers had proposed to support the bottom 10% of all staff to improvement and then, if unsuccessful, dismiss them (Bowie, 2015). Colin goes on to explain how IM initiatives were perceived differently across sections of the workforce:

> "We found that the people coming up with these messages were unwittingly trying to appeal to their own. You know, the people in these senior posts are high achievers, public school educated, from very well-off families, and have had this senior executive lifestyle their whole working lives which are a million miles removed from someone like me, who is just an ordinary guy trying to pay the mortgage and live in his hometown. We'd get these messages saying, "Great news, there's a town hall meeting in London tomorrow morning – turn up and take part," and of course, the people here in the regions were thinking, "well, how the hell can I do that when I work several hours' away?" But you'd also get these messages coming out which said that people should be mobile. They should move offices regularly – move regions or take positions in London – to get a breadth of experience and a holistic understanding of the Civil Service. Well, of course, this goes down great with your Fast Trackers [young graduates on the accelerated promotion scheme] and your thrusting young types who expect to be Perm Sec within six months, but it's no good at all for people who are tied to one office because they have families and mortgages and they value the fact that they have been doing the same job for years and are very good at it."

Whilst it is undoubtedly desirable for employees to gain a holistic understanding of their organisation, and to have opportunities for mobility, by stating that it is almost a prerequisite of success closes the doors to those wishing to remain in one office, and is likely to be very alienating – effectively saying that their behaviours and choices are inconsistent with the organisation's values, whilst transmitting a message which is very attractive to others. This raises the tricky question of intent. If the Civil Service sees the Fast Trackers as the vital talent of tomorrow, the future leaders who must be retained, and the region-based old hands as expensive (in terms of accrued pension entitlements), intransigent (in terms of immobility) and incompatible with their desired values, does it therefore follow that the Civil Service would try to target IM at its preferred target audience whilst knowingly turning off its less preferred audience segment? Taking the question even further, could it deliberately seek to alienate the latter segment of the audience simultaneously – in the way that a private club might court prestigious members whilst trying to get 'rid of the undesirables'? This question shall remain almost impossible to answer with certainty, either in the context of the UK Civil Service or other organisations, but by placing into a broader environmental context the two case studies used here (plus numerous others used in the larger research project), we can at least entertain the possibility that a combination of four types of ID have been at play, and these are discussed next.

KEY FINDINGS

Using the categories of demarketing examined earlier and applying them into an IM/ID context, we can consider four possible categories of ID:

Unintentional ID

This category of ID corresponds to Vasconcelos' (2008) notion of well-intentioned but botched IM. It results from a lack of ability or knowledge within the organisation, especially in terms of awareness of employees' needs. In this category, there is no segmentation of the internal audience, although the ID may not be equally negative to all staff. For example, if the Civil Service had genuinely not considered the possibility that some employees might value continuity and a settled home over mobility and promotion, then it would not have purposely segmented its audience or sought to demarket, but it would have a more deleterious effect upon certain staff segments.

Ostensible IM

By promising to guarantee a level of training which was already in place, but trumpeting it as a new initiative, an organisation is giving the impression of marketing, whilst actually demarketing – in this instance, ostensible IM. Whilst knowledge of employee needs is required, respect for employees is low and it is a covert strategy. Moreover, even though it may apply on an unsegmented basis, it cannot be unintentional. It is a deliberate choice made by senior management.

Selective IM

By segmenting its employee audience and targeting preferred staff members with positive and constructive IM approaches, an organisation could nurture its talent. Arguably, there is an overlap between selective IM and 'succession management'. It requires knowledge of the internal market and an awareness of different staff's needs and may not necessarily target the less preferred employees with negative messages and actions or intend them any damage.

Selective ID

Just as selective demarketing aims to rid an organisation of its less desirable customers whilst retaining the more desirable ones, so selective ID uses the same knowledge of staff needs as selective IM to segment the internal audience, but rather than intentionally targeting preferred staff with positive approaches, it intentionally targets less preferred staff with negative approaches, demarketing the organisation to them as an employer.

CONCLUSION

Whilst ID evidently occurred in both the above cases, and in numerous others within the research, it is difficult to ascertain if it constituted Unintentional ID – the well-intentioned but botched form of IM described by Vasconcelos (2008) – or if it qualified as Ostensible IM, Selective IM, Selective ID, or a combination thereof. As those actors responsible for ID are extremely unlikely to admit it to a researcher, there are perhaps only three plausible ways in which organisational intent can be supposed likely: (i) if a former employee or a whistle-blower admits, either to the researcher or a third party within the public domain, to demarketing their organisation intentionally to staff, and even then their motives and interpretations must be scrutinised to ensure they are not speaking without full knowledge of the facts or with a desire to damage their former employer; (ii) if a large body of publicly available information can provide a context which makes organisational intent likely on the balance of probability, as was the case for the UK Civil Service; and possibly (iii) through triangulation of data – for instance, by interviewing numerous independent employees within the same organisation to check for commonality of themes, and by undertaking Peer Debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to double check the legitimacy of one's interpretations.

One of the contexts which presented itself repeatedly within the broader data set was the publicly acknowledged need for an organisation to cut its wage bill, head count and staff costs. In almost all of the instances where participants had become marginalised or alienated by IM which they considered intentionally unattractive (i.e., – ID), information was available in the public domain which suggested the organisation was experiencing a financial downturn indicated by a drop in profits or turnover. Some organisations, which cannot be identified, had been the subject of speculation within broadcast and print media outlets, as they had lost key sales accounts or sought to renegotiate overheads such as rent. Contrastingly, of all the organisations within the broader study of IM where participants perceived the IM approaches as either neutral or positive but never negative (intentionally or otherwise), none embarked upon rationalisation, reduced their headcount by more than approximately 5%, publicly stated an intention to reduce costs, or were the subject of media speculation regarding their financial viability. Whilst correlation and causation are beyond the scope of this qualitative study – partially because ID was not the intended focus of the research but a major unanticipated theme emerging from it – the numbers involved certainly suggest a 'smoking gun' for future positivist research to explore. Likewise, all the demarketing organisations appeared to be experiencing or recovering from financial crises due to either macroenvironmental reasons (e.g., – the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis), microenvironmental factors (e.g., – increased competitor actions, sharpening customer demands, or the loss of a key sales account), or both. However, no attempt has been made here to examine whether macro- or microenvironmentally influenced crises are more likely to result in ID, or how each may influence the nature of that ID. These are questions to be taken up in subsequent research into this newly apparent phenomenon.

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