The Discovery of the HR Brand Concept in Thailand

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Abstract. *This research study explored the concept of the HR brand in the Thai context. It was a qualitatively designed study using grounded theory and the interview method. The interviews were conducted with 25 HR managers in Thailand and other experts who were selected by purposive sampling, theoretical sampling, and the snowball technique. The researcher transcribed and analyzed the interview data by applying a coding analysis which employed the process of grounded theory-building research. This research study also used the qualitative software, ATLAS.ti 6.2 program, to categorize all the codes that emerged from the raw data and for data management. The major findings were grouped into 21 categories. These exploratory findings revealed a new concept of the HR brand as a total brand reflection. In addition, a conceptual framework was used to understand the phenomenon of the new HR brand concept. This study's findings contribute important new knowledge in the areas of HRM, HRD, OD, and marketing. It also opens up the view of HR professionals as employing more strategic thinking, thereby helping develop their skills of being a strategic partner in their company's mission.*

Keywords: HR Brand, HR Strategic Partner, Brand Building, Image of employee.

Introduction

Because of the increasing branding of companies, especially in industries such as financial services and consumer goods and services (Alessandri & Alessandri, 2004; Martin, Beaumont, Doig & Pate, 2005; Schultz & deChernatony, 2002), this phenomenon affects the corporate strategists in considering or looking inwards to engage the 'hearts and minds' of employees. Thus, branding is not only an opportunity to shape customers' perceptions about the organization, it is also an opportunity to shape employee perceptions (Berry, 2000). However, Knox and Bickerton (2003) argued that corporate branding is more complex, as it is required that the senior managers pay attention to conducting these practices at the level of the organization, rather than at the individual product or service level, and the requirement to manage interactions with multiple stakeholder audiences. Furthermore, critical behavior for reputations and brands depends on the outcomes of knowledge, skills and abilities of individual employees and it will become the intellectual capital of the organization (Martin & Hetrick, 2006). Consequently, HR departments are increasingly expected to operate as a business within a business (Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholtz & Younger, 2008), in which they have strategies, goals, and the challenge of allocating resources to deliver value, particularly in emerging services and knowledge economies. However, the image of a typical HR department is commonly defined as being the support function, in which 70-80 percent of its work involves administrative activities, while HR professionals themselves have only a limited chance to perform and be part of the company's strategic management team. Even if they are well-organized and ready to serve the business's needs, HR practitioners are often the victims of wrongheaded expectations by their internal customers, including line managers, the CEO, investors and even employees who sometimes feel uncomfortable with HR services (Rothwell *et al.*, 2008). At the same time, HR practitioners have not typically been admired by top management, because they lack the communication skills to present and interpret why human resource management (HRM) and human resource development (HRD) are important, especially in the knowledge age (Sikaw & Jintapayongkul, 2008).

For this reason, it is a significant challenge for the role of the HR function, as well as the capability of HR professionals to 'round themselves out', to lead and to deliver people strategies that support their company's reputation and brand. Therefore, HR functions should find some tools that help them to promote and embed their stakeholders to understand what they are doing and develop a clear mindset in those stakeholders that they are ready to be a strategic partner and to occupy a seat at the board room. Banerjee (2008, p. 36) stated that "creating one's own HR brand can continue to protect strategic interests of the firm and sustain the level of support to enable the achievement of corporate objectives". To investigate the concept of the HR Brand, the researcher reviewed the SAGE online journal from January 1979 through to March 2011 (http://online.sagepub.com/). When the keyword 'HR Brand' was used, only a few articles were identified. Then, using the separate words, "HR" and "Brand", 981 articles were found in all fields, but most articles were not directly relevant to HR Brand as intent. Nevertheless, it was found that 'employment brand' and 'employer brand' are quite close to the HR brand definition. As Banerjee (2008) argued, HR branding is a subset of employer branding. It was also found that, by adding the HR values, HR creates the 'HR value proposition' (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005), in which the content of branding is related to the way of marketing it. However, all these articles were based on research conducted outside Thailand. The researcher was interested in studying what is the HR brand concept, particularly in the context of different countries where culture is a key factor that influences organizational behavior. The aim in conducting this study was that the results will guide HR professionals, especially in Thailand, to develop the concept of HR brand and use it as a tool for building their reputation in the future.

Purpose of the Study

As mentioned earlier, there are few research studies which apply theories on the concept of branding into the HR field, particularly in Thailand. Thus, there is an unclear definition of HR brand in the Thai context. For this reason, the purpose of this study was to explore an understanding of the HR brand concept from the viewpoint of the 25 participants who were all HR managers in their organizations. The results of this exploratory research will develop the HR brand definition for this study and help the reader to form an overview of the conceptual framework of the HR brand concept.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The focus of this study considered the perspectives of the participants, who were all HR managers in their organizations, in order to understand the HR brand concept. The findings were underlying themes emerging from the experiences in their organizations, context and thoughts about the experiences, and the overall essence of the HR brand. Because the participants' perspectives of the interview were influenced strongly by their past and present work experience with the HR departments of the companies, some of the interview questions derived from their context and arising from their answers to the questions were included in the interview guide.

However, the study's generalizability may be limited or may not be used as being representative of all Thai companies, as the results were based on the researcher's consideration as to its purpose and paradigm of the research, which may be different from Thai companies in general.

Research Design

Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p. 64) confirmed that the research design includes "the overall approach to be taken and detailed information about how the study will be carried out, with whom and where". It is a plan or proposal to conduct research that involves the intersection of philosophy, strategies of inquiry, and specific methods (Creswell, 2009, p. 5). Creswell (2009, p. 3) also argued that the selection of a research design is based on the nature of the research problem or issue being addressed, the researcher's personal experiences, and the audiences for the study. For this study, the research design started from the discovery from the literature review that little research has been conducted on the nature of the HR brand concept, particularly in Thailand. Therefore, this

research employed a grounded theory research strategy in order to explore the HR brand concept or phenomenon. Strauss and Corbin (1998) explained that grounded theory is derived from data, systematically gathered and analyze through the research process, and it is a good design to use when a theory is not available to explain a process (Creswell, 2007). In addition, it is a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation of a process, action or interaction shaped by the views of the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For this reason, a qualitative research method was useful and appropriate for this study, because qualitative research can provide a 'deeper' understanding of a social phenomenon than would be obtained from purely quantitative data (Silverman, 2000, p. 8). Furthermore, Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p. 18) suggested that a qualitative method will help the researcher to capture what people say and do, how they interpret the world as "we create our world with words"– words are the way that most people come to understand their situations.   It remains sufficiently open and flexible to permit exploration of whatever the phenomenon under study offers for inquiry, as well as continues to be emergent even after data collection begins (Patton, 2002, p. 255).

Data Collection

In terms of data collection, purposive sampling and theoretical sampling were used to identify participants who were all HR managers in their organizations. In addition, the snowball technique was used when one participant referred to others who had knowledge and experiences in responding to the research problem. Thus, the final participants were not only HR managers, but they were also other experts who were named by using the snowball technique. In order to collect the data, the researcher constructed the research instrument, which was an interview guide, by using Joungtrakul's (2010) interview template which consists of seven columns: (1) research questions; (2) research objectives; (3) literature review; (4) expected information from participant; (5) interview questions as guided by Patton (2002); (6) selected interview questions; and (7) reason to select each question. Before the interviewing began, this interview guide was submitted to experts who could advise on the sort of questions that were relevant and appropriate to the design of the interview guide (Joungtrakul, 2009). This process also helped the researcher adjust the interview questions, as well as develop the skill of the interviewer (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

During the in-depth interview process, a tape-recorder was used, subject to the approval of the interviewees. The observation method was also used in order to study their body language (Marshall &Rossman, 2006). Then, their answers to the questions were transcribed and the coded data were analyzed using the qualitative software, ATLAS.ti 6.2. The researcher also ensured that each process satisfied ethical criteria and quality control. The final number of the participants was 25, determined by completeness or saturation of the properties of a theoretical category or, in other words, no more new conceptual insights were generated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Bloor & Wood, 2006).

Data Analysis

The data analysis began after the data from the first interview were transcribed. This process enabled the researcher to understand more deeply the accumulating data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). In addition, this procedure was consistent with the process of data analysis, suggested by Eagan (2002), that data analysis is the interchange with data collection which is unique to grounded theory research. It was undertaken in response to ongoing data collection and comparison. Therefore, the data were initially analyzed as open codes and then the researcher compared and revised codes and checked for emerging categories. Furthermore, the researcher wrote memos that contained her thinking about the data, where necessary. The researcher also used the ATLAS.ti 6.2 software program for the coding analysis and management. The next step was to make explicit connections between categories in order to understand the phenomenon of the HR brand concept. Finally, these categories were compiled for the discussion of findings and formed the framework for an emerging theory.

Rigor of the Study

Creswell (2007) has recommended that researchers should employ at least three methods in order to increase the trustworthiness of their qualitative research findings. Therefore, this study employed three strategies: (1) triangulation; this technique is the most popular and cost-effective procedure (Creswell, 2007). The researcher used data triangulation by comparing her observations with her interview data, comparing what people said in public with what they said in private, cross-checking the consistency of information, and comparing the perspectives of participants; (2) a reflexive journal; this helped the researcher reshape and reconstruct what she learned from the participants; and (3) an *audit trail* for ensuring that all data and documents were used to present a rigorous account of this study and the confirmability of the data collection, because it minimizes bias, maximizes accuracy, and allows the researcher to report impartially (Patton, 2002).

Findings and Discussion

From the process of data analysis, the major findings were grouped into 21 emerging categories: (1) A symbol of the organization; (2) Image of people in the organization; (3) Roles of HR Function, whereby four sub-categories were found: business partner, change agent, marketer, and administrative; (4) Perception of HR brand; (5) Business context; (6) Business direction and policy; (7) Accommodate workplace; (8) Warm relationship; (9) Management support; (10) Working process; (11) Recruitment and selection; (12) Training and development; (13) Rewards and recognitions; (14) Personality; (15) Behavior; (16) Benefits of HR brand; (17) Barrier of building the HR brand; (18) Employee engagement; (19) Preparation for building the HR brand; (20) Buy-in concept; and (21) Maintenance process. These findings revealed a new concept of the HR brand which is generally not well-known in the Thai HR community. Thus, the participants related the HR brand to the marketing concept of the brand which is usually used for product design, packaging and communication (Aaker, 2010). Therefore, other concepts were mentioned, such as product brand, corporate brand, employer brand, and employment brand. However, the concept of employment brand was highlighted, because Sullivan (2004) stated that the HR brand is a form of employment brand which was a long-term recruitment and retention strategy. Therefore, this concerns the role of HR in supporting and promoting a company's image as a great place to work for talented people, as well as the image of the organization among employees. In addition, the study found that most participants perceived the word 'HR' to stand for 'HR functions or department', while there is another, different viewpoint from some participants who perceived that 'HR' stands for 'Population in the organization or all employees'. Thus, these distinct meanings divided the HR brand into two themes, which were the 'HR brand as roles of HR functions' and the 'HR brand as an image of a people–driven business strategy'. In addition, the researcher found that another theme emerged from the grounded data, referring to the HR brand as a symbol of the organization. Consequently, the three themes that emerged will now be discussed in order to discover and define the HR brand concept, as well as its conceptual framework.

HR Brand as Roles of the HR Function

Many participants perceived that the *'roles of HR function stand for HR brand'*, in which all roles can support and enhance the corporate brand building strategy, particularly the business partner roles. The role of the business partner was primarily expected to create a more responsive client-centered service, which is proactive in its approach to developing the business, so as to cope with the competitive market, as well as to create trust and acceptance from top management. In addition, HR staff themselves also want to demonstrate their capabilities at the strategic level in order to be recognized for reliability and credibility from senior management. This point was extracted from the following statements:

"...almost HR professional usually want to be a partner of business instead of thinking about the image of HR function." [P25]

Moreover, some participants also referred to other roles represented by Ulrich (1997), including

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change agent, employee champion, and the classic role – administrative expert. The participants shared the view that if they were not competitive, the role of HR may just be only that of an administrator. However, some participants said that:

"…actually, HR Brand emerged for a long time since the HR function worked in the role of Personnel Administration but it depends on the type of business that defined what role of HR should be." [P23]

In addition, the role of marketer was mentioned by some participants. In other words, its role was that of brand builder. This role supports and enhances the corporate brand building strategy, as it can persuade people in the organization to participate in all company activities and to create the corporate brand together. Its role requires multiple competencies which are consistent with the competencies of the brand consultant that were explored in the research study conducted by Laukaikul (2009), such as having strong communication skills, working well with clients at all levels, having a facilitator's skills, engaging in the client's business intellectually and emotionally. In addition, applying the marketing concept helps HR to re-image themselves from the role of traditional or conservative HR to the role of business partner, in which HR staff are more proactive, creative, and achieve involvement from others by using integrated marketing communication.

In conclusion, all roles of the HR function were perceived as the HR brand, but its value was at a different level which depends on the capability of the HR function, on how they can initiate an approach responding to the business direction. That is why one participant said "the business partner role was as the premium brand" [P1]. However, even though they have this ability, the brand of HR may be just as an administrative expert if the leaders, owners or top management do not support them for the new structure, modern knowledge and IT resources, according to the statement of the participant who argued that:

"…I think it turns to two points, first most problems of building brand continuously was HR do not have competence or do not understand business and branding. They still have old paradigm. Second, perhaps HR understands how to do well but they don't have working structure to support them enough so they cannot do anything too much. Some organization defined HR roles separate in HRD and HRM but some may not have either one, HR only do payroll or administrative works. Whenever you have old HR paradigm, you cannot do corporate branding. You, leaders, must change their paradigm and practices." [P13]

Consequently, building the HR brand, which are the roles of HR functions, not only required the support from top management, but top management themselves must also believe in the value of humans and having the spirit of management. On the other hand, HR functions need to be strong in their profession and must learn and develop their capability that helps their business compete. Otherwise, the roles of HR functions will still be the same as the traditional role, as a support or administrative role.

HR Brand as Image of People-Driven Business Strategy

Another theme that emerged from the interview data referred to the word "HR" as standing for people in the organization or employees, who perform and behave as brand representatives in order to reflect what the company stands for. In the perspective of many customers, they are the brand, as they live the brand by taking customers' orders, handling problems, fulfilling a request or either processing a checkout or greeting an arriving shopper (McEwen, 2005). It concerns the image of employees which occurred from their qualities of their work and behaviors, interacting with customers or stakeholders. Thus, its image is representing the whole organization's image, of which it can be defined as the HR brand or, in other words, it was the *'image of a people-driven business strategy'*. This point was extracted from the following statements:

"...when we talked about branding in terms of HR, meaning that how HR, who is population in the organization, reflect what their company stands for in the market…because only physical organization such as big building cannot present what company stands for. It's people in those organizations who present and build the image of organization…this is the image of us that can walk and talk to reflect our company being." [P17]

"…what does brand come from? Yes, it comes from behaviors, quality and competences of our people." [P5]

However, Carbone (2004) stated that what customers value is the experience which is framed by both the emotional and rational value being created on the surface and, even more importantly, on a deeper emotional level. He also mentioned that the experience is almost a mirror image of the experience you get at company A. Thus, the interconnection between employees and customers is creating the value to customers in different ways, while customers can perceive it to be rewarding or punishing them and it influences the organization's image and reputation. On the other hand, employees can both promote and demote organizations, depending on their job satisfaction and engagement level. Therefore, Mitchell (2002) stated that, in achieving employee commitment to the organizational brand, an organization must create an emotional connection with employees to make the brand come alive for them in order to persuade them to align their values and behaviors with those of the company's brand. This point was explained by participant P18:

"…at the first date of join, I was invited to induction program which they did not communicate about compensation or benefits as they said you can get more HR information from intranet, instead, they brought me to know the legend of this company *via* video presentation. It liked to cultivate us at the first join and we will be in love with them even we may earn low salary or unhappy with supervisor for sometimes, but we still work here as there are not good workplace as here. This was depth in-love." [P18]

This view is consistent with Urde (1999, p. 129), who suggested that an organization must create a clear understanding of the internal brand identity at the first stage of brand building. Then, the brand can become a strategic platform that provides the framework for the satisfaction of customers' wants and needs. However, each person has their own personality or identity that is cultivated from their family, society or community, as well as their home town. It also depends on their personal attitude and self-determination, which Deci and Ryan (1985, p. 38) defined as "a quality of human functioning that involves the experience of choice". In other words, they explained that it was "the capacity to choose and to have those choices, rather than reinforcement contingencies, drives, or any other forces or pressures, be the determinants of one's actions" (1985, p. 38). As an example of this point, P10 said:

"…once you wear the hat that assigning you are the employee, you will answer in other ways. Conversely, when you left the office, you would be another person or be yourself to perform another role." [P10]

Therefore, it does not mean that employees are always ready to present their company's brand, but an individual's personal brand was also included when they feel they are outside of the employer's control. Consequently, organizations are required to design and develop attractive programs, as well as manage employment experiences in a positive way, so as to engage them in a brand championship which has a positive effect on sales and profits (Fram & McCarthy, 2003).

HR Brand as a Symbol of the Organization

"Symbol (n.) is a sign, shape or object which is used to represent something else; something that is used to represent a quality or idea; an object can be described as a symbol of something else if it seems to represent it, because it is connected with it in a lot of people's minds." (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2003, p. 1297)

Similarly, The Longman Advanced American Dictionary (2000, p. 1475) stated:

"Symbol (n.) is a picture, shape, color etc. that has a particular meaning or represents an idea; someone or something that represents a quality or idea."

These two entries illustrate that the primary use of the word 'symbol' represents either objects or qualities or ideas which connect to people's minds. However, in terms of brand, Aaker (2010) confirmed that anything that represents the brand can be a symbol, whereby a strong symbol can be the cornerstone of a brand strategy.   He also divided symbols into three types: (1) visual imagery - can be memorable and powerful; (2) metaphors - the symbol or a symbol characteristic representing a functional, emotional, or self-expressive benefit; and (3) the brand heritage - represents the essence of a brand. For this reason, the above definition of symbol supported the finding that the HR brand was a symbol of the organization, because the results from the grounded data showed that the participants contrasted the metaphor HR brand with the traditional definition of brand which referred to logo, trademark, symbol or tangible asset. As an example, P5 stated:

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"…as my understanding it can consider into two parts which are HR and Brand, HR is people and Brand is symbol or logo…HR brand is a logo of people in the organization whether what it looks like and then this transfers to external in order to communicate how quality of people in this organization." [P5]

In addition, the participants claimed that it was easier to understand and remember the pattern of a visible concept, because a symbol made it much easier to gain recognition and recall and may be part of the identity reflecting their potential power (Aaker, 2010). Another reason was that the participants were also familiar with the traditional brand concept representing the process of marketing in selling the products and it was only the responsibility of the marketing function. This is consistent with Werner and Kaplan (1967), who argued that humans formed or employed symbols from cognitive constructions, because it was serving a novel and unique function of representation, rather than seeing things on the same level as other humans did. It was used to "designate the relation between an abstract concept and a concrete object" (p. 15). However, when they combined 'HR' into the brand concept, it was an argument that the HR brand was unlikely to refer only to a logo or trademark, as it was beyond being a tangible asset. Rather, it referred to the values of the organization which involve business directions, such as its vision and mission, including the organizational history or heritage. Therefore, some participants mentioned that the HR brand must rely on the organizational brand. As P6 said:

"…Many organizations start creating a corporate brand first so as to use it as the tools for developing the HR brand." [P6]

Furthermore, if the organization was well-known in the market, then it will be perceived that they have a good quality of products, services, and people, including the internal working process and people management. Consequently, it was found that the timing of the HR brand depended on whether the organization was ready to use it as a business strategy or not. Besides, in small companies, the business owners or CEOs were the informal HR brand or it was called "owner brand" [P5], because the external customers can perceive what this organization stands for *via* the behaviors of its owners. Whether they like it or not, the owner is now a symbol of the organization.

Conclusion

The HR brand concept, as perceived by the participants, was divided into three themes: (1) HR brand as the role of HR function; (2) HR brand as the image of a people-driven business strategy; and (3) HR brand as the symbol of the organization. However, when drawing up and connecting these themes together, the researcher found that there were common properties of the HR brand. There are the representations and reflection of the brand's image; creation of credibility and reliability; and the need for accumulated acceptance or extra effort to achieve trust.   In addition, there was a strong relationship between the three themes that emerged, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure1. The discovery of the HR brand concept (Source: Generated by the researcher)
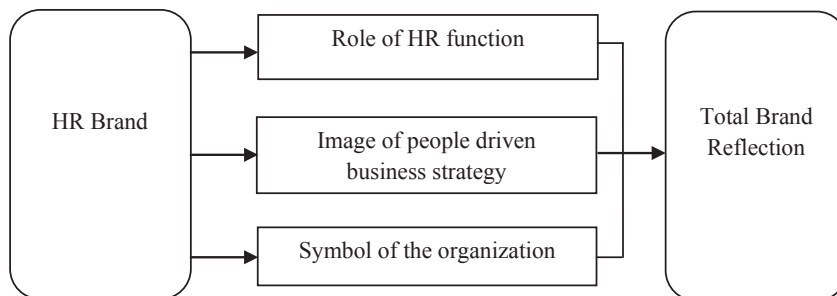

Figure 1 illustrates the point that the HR brand is representing and reflecting the role of the HR function, the image of the people in the organization, and the symbol of the organization, in order to create credibility and reliability and to achieve trust from customers and stakeholders. In other words,

the HR brand is the *total brand reflection*, of which everyone in the organization is representing and reflecting all brands created by the organization, such as employer brand, employee brand, product brand and HR function's brand. In the meantime, this new concept emphasizes that the HR brand is not only the brand of HR functions. It can create the acceptance from customers and stakeholders which requires accumulated times and it becomes the image of the organization, as well as a symbol of the organization. In summary, the researcher has defined the definition of the HR brand for this study as follows:

A symbol of the organization that results from the positive image of people in the organization or employees in representing and reflecting all brands, including the organization's identity and environment, as well as the quality of its people and management system; and it builds faith in the brand to employees, credibility and trust of customers and stakeholders, including the society and communities, which results in the organization's development and sustainability.

Furthermore, the new concept of HR brand has explored the relationships between the 21 categories which were divided into four dimensions: Total brand reflection; HR brand image; Organization image and identity; and the HR brand building process, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The proposed conceptual framework of the HR brand (Source: Generated by the researcher)
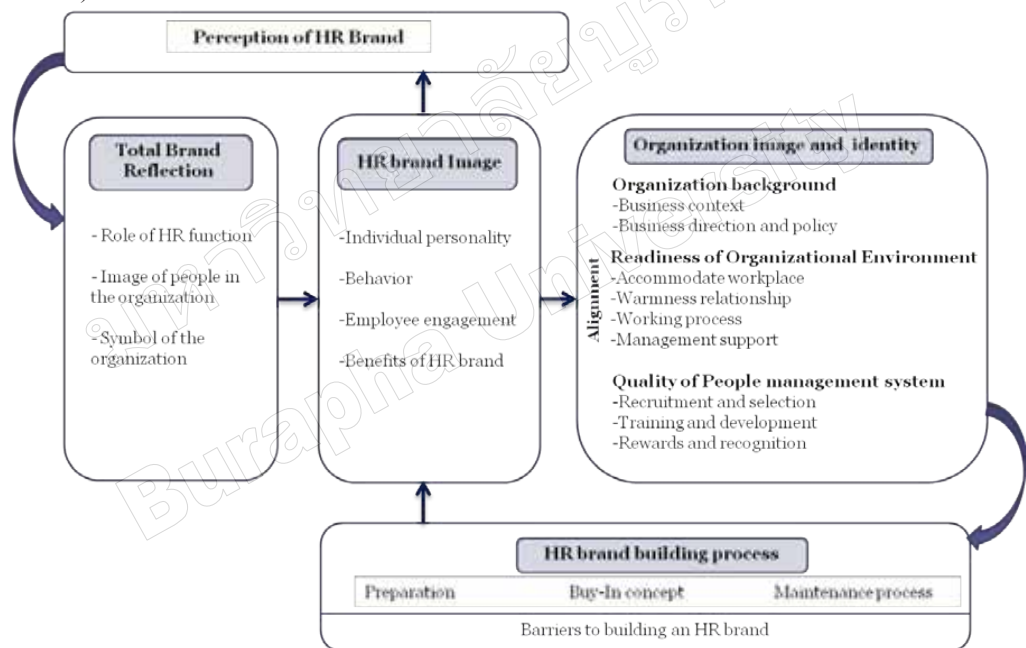

Figure 2 describes the categories' interactions, starting with the dimension of the total brand reflection which is a result of the outside influences, which are customers, stakeholders, societies and communities, who are perceiving the HR brand by contrasting the metaphor of the HR brand with the organization brand. It includes the categories of the role of HR function, image of people in the organization, and symbol of the organization. Then, it influences the dimension of the HR brand image which refers to the functional and emotional benefits after customers and stakeholders have had an interaction with the HR brand. It includes the categories of individual personality, behavior, employee engagement, and the benefits of HR brand. Whether the image of HR brand is positive or negative, it is sequentially reflected in the dimension of the organizational image and identity. This dimension refers to the reflection on what the outsiders think simultaneously about the organization's history and value proposition, organizational environment, and the quality of its people management system through the HR brand. In the meantime, it is the starting point of the inside which is the place for building the HR brand by selecting and developing the quality of people in order to represent the brand. This dimension consists of three main categories and nine sub-categories. The first main

category is called "organization background", describing the categories of business context, business direction and policy. Next was "readiness of organizational environment", which is represented by the categories of accommodate workplace, warm relationships, working process, and management support. The third category is "quality of the people management system", which includes the categories of recruitment and selection, training and development, and rewards and recognition. In addition, it was found that all these three major categories must be aligned and it influenced the last dimension of the HR brand building process. The dimension of HR brand building process refers to the process of decoding the organizational image and identity into the preferred characteristics of the HR brand and getting everyone in the organization to buy-into it and to perform as planned. Additionally, every stage of HR brand building requires a well-organized management in order to minimize the barriers that may happen. It results in the HR brand image, which then affects the outside stakeholders. This dimension includes four categories: preparation for building an HR brand; buy-in concept; maintenance process; and barriers to building an HR brand.

   In conclusion, this conceptual framework proposed the linkage of the marketing concept of brand into the HRD area. It proposed that people in the organization or employees, including HR staff, can be the HR brand in order to represent and reflect the organizational image and identity to customers and stakeholders. Therefore, the HR functions play an important role on behalf of organization to be a brand builder in order to select the right person, develop them to perform in line with the organizational image and identity, and maintain them as they can create intellectual capital for organizational sustainability in the future. Consequently, the closer the HR brand image was to customers' expectations, the higher were customers' engagement and loyalty. The HR brand that emerged is one of the business strategies in which it creates a competitive advantage in the market.

Implications

The discovery of the concept of the HR brand by this study and the conceptual framework of the HR brand as another type of brand in the organization are important empirical findings for the HRD field. However, it is distinct from other brands, as it occurs from the image of people in the organization who represent the organization's identity and environment, as well as the quality of its people and management system. Additionally, this brand's representatives can promote themselves by talking, walking, sharing or serving directly to customers or stakeholders; and it promotes emotional benefits simultaneously once they interact with the HR brand. Furthermore, this brand can drive the business strategy properly under the condition of employee engagement, where both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are crucial tools. Consequently, the HR brand concept that was proposed by the researcher synthesizes the new knowledge that she gained in the areas of HRD, HRM and marketing. Its concept links the knowledge of marketing, HRD and HRM, by which organizations can benefit in developing and implementing the brand strategy across the board. In addition, the HR brand is not only the new knowledge for strategic HRM and strategic HRD, but it is also a strategic tool for the HR function to reimage itself from serving a support function to being involved in strategic thinking and planning for the business, which creates a new image of reliability and credibility for HR. Besides, the researcher believes that this concept also opens up the view of HR professionals to more strategic thinking, thereby helping develop their skills of being a strategic partner.

Recommendation for Further Research

From the results of this study, the researcher recommends further research as follows: ***Firstly***, a survey of other HR professionals for their perspectives of the proposed concept of HR brand and conceptual framework, so as to confirm the theoretical conceptualization that was proposed. The study may be designed by using statistical tests in a quantitative research design. In the meantime, with the same research design, it can be tested with other professionals, such as marketing, brand consultants and senior management. Thus, the results of these studies will develop this concept more practically and in different contexts. ***Secondly***, the researcher recommends conducting qualitative research to explore the concept of brand engagement, as well as how to build it in Thailand. In conclusion, this study

found that the brand engagement concept was not only employee engagement in which employees were dedicated in their work, have feelings of loyalty and are happy to work there. It was also more meaningful that employees protected their brand. This research will help HR or OD professionals to become aware of the need to protect their brand, as it supports the company's reputation in the next era.

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