

# **Undermining My Authority - Becoming a Brand Manager**

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## **MANAGEMENT DECISION**

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The authors prepared this case solely as a basis for class discussion and not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. Although based on real events and despite occasional references to actual companies, this case is fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons or entities is coincidental.

## How would you react in Alex’s position?

This document contains the commentary on the case *Undermining My Authority – Becoming a Brand Manager* from three seasoned practitioners: Josefina, Nick, and Niklas. Each of them is highly experienced in the field, offering valuable perspectives on the topic.

### Case Commentary

*Josefina Skillius – Marketing Manager at Hafi*

In response to the question of what action to take in this position, it’s essential to understand the company's intention behind hiring Alex. The organization has a clear vision for the future and recognizes the need for fresh perspectives to achieve its goals. Thus, they decided to bring in a young, talented individual from outside the division – someone like Alex, who is seen as the bearer of new energy and innovative ideas.

The responsibility for Alex’s integration and the success of this new direction falls squarely on the shoulders of the management or the specific manager who approved his hiring. It’s crucial that they stand by Alex, especially when facing resistance or skepticism within the team. In Alex’s position, to align my efforts with the company's expectations, I would initiate a candid conversation with the supervisor or the decision-making authority. The purpose of this dialogue would be to clarify their expectations and the specific changes they envision. This step is crucial for setting a clear direction for my role and responsibilities.

As Alex encounters internal difficulties, it’s imperative for him to engage in open dialogue with both his superiors and team. Questions about expectations, desired changes, and how to navigate any resistance are vital. However, it’s the responsibility of the management to communicate the company’s direction clearly to all employees, not just Alex. They must articulate how everyone can contribute to the collective journey towards achieving the company's vision. This approach fosters a sense of unity and purpose, encouraging employees to decide whether they are committed to this shared goal. If employees are not committed towards this shared goal, it’s important that the management team set clear expectations: those who are unwilling to support the collective journey towards these new goals must reconsider their place within the organization.

However, it's also possible that Alex may perceive these challenges as personal failures, potentially leading to feelings of discrimination or alienation. Such

experiences could prompt him to leave, which would not only be a loss for him but also a missed opportunity for the company to evolve. Therefore, fostering a supportive work environment where individuals are encouraged to learn from one another is essential. In doing so, the company can ensure that the introduction of new perspectives, like those Alex brings, enriches the organization rather than divides it.

*Nick Gabery Adams – CMO Arjo, Former VP Corporate Branding at Novo Nordisk*

Alex clearly does not have an easy job as new manager for this team. When moving into a position like this it is important to get a good understanding of the current situation and make a suitable action plan before rashly making any decisions. However in this case action needs to happen quickly to get the team on track.

Immediately the challenge of Robert Smith needs to be dealt with. This should be a meeting between Alex and Robert where Alex listens to Robert's needs and expectations but where Alex is clear about his own expectations of Robert and the team. Following this, new job descriptions for Robert and other team members should be produced and communicated. I would also implement a number of individual and team based goals (OKR's) including behavioral goals for the team to ensure they are working together to achieve the needed digital transformation. Included in this could be a number of development actions to help the team get to the next level of digital marketing with team based and individual training.

*Niklas Granlund – Former Partner at Implement Consulting Group*

The temporal perspective holds significant importance in this scenario. If nine months have elapsed without any tangible progress and the urgency to act is pressing, then exploration of more drastic measures becomes warranted. Conversely, if Alex is new to the role, currently in a formative phase, and possesses sufficient time, alternative strategies can be considered. The latter scenario will be the starting point in my commentary.

In my view, effective brand building starts from within. Consistency between internal actions and outside expectations is paramount; verbal affirmations lose meaning if not upheld internally. Consequently, within the framework of the company's digital and innovative transformation, establishing a "learning journey" within the team is imperative. This initiative would encompass areas such as innovation, emerging technologies, digital platforms, data utilization, and it could be case-based. While I may not spearhead this effort personally, I would ensure its implementation, possibly by engaging external expertise, to equip the team with requisite knowledge. I believe much of the team's resistance stems from a lack of adequate knowledge about the new initiatives. It's essential to recognize that when individuals don't perceive themselves as valued, competent, or liked within a new framework, resistance naturally arises.

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Moreover, I would dedicate a separate process to engage Robert Smith, recognizing his influential role within the team. Understanding his motivations and concerns is pivotal. Collaboration with such informal leaders can significantly influence the success of change initiatives, as they possess the potential to become powerful advocates in the long term.

Furthermore, recognizing the shortcomings in the handover process, I propose initiating this learning journey by inviting a representative from top management to elucidate the rationale behind my appointment in this particular scenario. This could be conducted in the format of an interview, offering insights into their decision to opt for unconventional candidates for this role and their desire for innovation. Such an initiative would serve to dispel any lingering perceptions of being an outsider or a “greenie”, while also acknowledging my competence for driving progress in this new direction.

In essence, it’s important that the team *experiences* what the company wants to achieve in terms of their brand. This way, they understand it and become a part of it. It is not merely about discussing it, but rather experiencing it firsthand. Equally important is recognizing the merits of past approaches and identifying areas for improvement, while also emphasizing the necessity of adapting to a new paradigm. This evolving landscape demands novel competencies and strategies, underscoring the imperative for embracing change and innovation.