



# LUND UNIVERSITY

## Corporate Brand Positioning – Case Studies across Firm Levels and Over Time

Koch, Christian

2014

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Koch, C. (2014). *Corporate Brand Positioning – Case Studies across Firm Levels and Over Time*. [Doctoral Thesis (monograph), Department of Business Administration]. Lund University Press.

*Total number of authors:*

1

### General rights

Unless other specific re-use rights are stated the following general rights apply:

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Read more about Creative commons licenses: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117  
221 00 Lund  
+46 46-222 00 00



# Corporate Brand Positioning

## Case Studies across Firm Levels and Over Time

---

CHRISTIAN H. KOCH

SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT | LUND UNIVERSITY 2014





# Corporate Brand Positioning

Case Studies across Firm Levels and Over Time

Christian H. Koch



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY



Copyright © Christian H. Koch

Cover picture © Neues Museum | Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / Christian H. Koch

Lund University, School of Economics and Management,  
Department of Business Administration

ISBN 978-91-7623-124-1 (print)

ISBN 978-91-7623-125-8 (pdf)

Printed in Sweden by Media-Tryck, Lund University  
Lund 2014



KLIMATKOMPENSERAT  
PAPPER



# Acknowledgments

*“In these tributes [acknowledgments] authors seek to shed some light on the human being behind the academic intellectual and its highly specialized occupational role; they also provide a glimpse at a wishful fantasy of a way of life and relationships that academic intellectuals aspire to.” (Hollander, 2001, p. 76)*

Some of the respondents in this study have described the corporate brand positioning projects I studied as ‘long journeys’ – likewise, my own process towards the PhD degree has been a challenging yet rewarding journey. I could not have undertaken this journey without the support of several people, who I wish to acknowledge.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my principal supervisor, Mats Urde, for providing me with the opportunity to enter the research arena within the field of strategic brand management. His support, ideas, and advice were invaluable for writing this thesis. Thank you Mats for interesting discussions during formal meetings, over the phone, while sailing, and over some beers! I would also like to thank my second supervisor, Johan Anselmsson, for his advice and support over the last four years.

I also wish to thank my various research seminar discussants during the PhD journey. Jens Hultman followed my research from the early stages until the finalization of my thesis. His comments and advice were invaluable. Richard Jones came into the process only during the final year, yet his thoughtful and detailed comments helped to improve and strengthen my thesis. His commitment and input were truly indispensable. Finally, I would like to thank Ulf Johansson for his encouragement to follow the ‘process track’ in the early-to-middle stages of my thinking and writing process.

Special thanks are also due to my contact persons and respondents at ABB, Trelleborg, Holmen, and brand consultancy Ehrensträhle DDB. Without access to their world, it would not have been possible to conduct this research. Thank you for opening the gates to the world of corporate brand positioning practice!

I am also thankful for Michael Beverland’s and Bill Merrilees’ valuable comments and ideas during branding conferences in Berlin and London.

As for my dear PhD colleagues, I wish to first thank my research project companion and office roommate Kaj-Dac for interesting brand discussions and fun times

throughout the years. I am also very grateful for good times and interesting debates during our famous 'German lunches'. Thank you Stephan, Anna, Lena, and Janina! I would also like to thank Wen, Nuk, Clarissa and Yaqian for the lovely 'Asian dinners' at various occasions. Thank you all for great times and delicious food tastings. And, of course, I need to mention the countless 'Swedish fikas' and research seminars with many more people from the corridors of Alfa 1 and Alfa 2. Thank you all for interesting and inspiring discussions, both research-related and non-research-related.

I am extremely grateful to my wonderful parents. Your support and encouragement throughout my education and the PhD years is unparalleled. Thank you so much for believing in me!

Last, but surely not least, I wish to thank Sandra for her love, support, encouragement, constructive criticism, patience, and understanding. You are my tower of strength!

Malmö, October 2014

C. H. K.





# Contents

<b>Chapter 1   Introduction</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Brand Positioning – From Content to Process .....	16
Corporate Brand Positioning – From Static to Dynamic.....	17
Industrial Multi-Business Firm Context .....	19
This Study .....	20
Research Aim and Question .....	20
Case Study Method .....	21
Case Companies .....	21
Thesis Outline .....	22
<b>Chapter 2   Theoretical Framework</b> .....	<b>23</b>
Positioning.....	23
Positioning and Brand Management .....	24
Positioning and Strategic Management .....	28
Principal Conceptualizations and Applications.....	29
Market-Oriented and Brand-Oriented Positioning .....	30
Schools of Positioning.....	34
Consequences of Choosing Between Approaches to Positioning .....	39
Brand Positioning Dynamics.....	40
Summary .....	42
Corporate Branding .....	43
Corporate Branding Fundamentals .....	43
Corporate Brands and Brand Architecture .....	46
Corporate Branding Dynamics.....	48
Summary .....	51
Corporate Brand Positioning .....	51
Corporate Rebranding .....	53
A Processual Approach to Positioning.....	55
Process Orientation in Management Studies .....	56
Process Research on Change and Strategy Formation.....	57
Practice Research on Change and Strategy Formation.....	61
Summary .....	62
<b>Chapter 3   Research Model</b> .....	<b>63</b>

Research Model Development.....	63
Dual Level Model .....	63
Temporal Location .....	65
Brand Positioning Drivers.....	65
Brand Positioning Action.....	66
Brand Positioning Outcomes .....	67
Brand Positioning Challenges .....	67
Summary .....	67
<b>Chapter 4   Methodology .....</b>	<b>68</b>
Case Study Research Design.....	68
Research Philosophy: Critical Realism Position.....	69
Multiple Case Studies with Embedded Design.....	74
Case Company Choice: ABB, Trelleborg, and Holmen .....	75
Case Selection and Unit of Analysis .....	80
Research Process .....	80
Generating Process Data .....	81
Interviews .....	81
Archival Documents .....	83
Non-Participant Observation.....	83
Temporal Orientation in Process Research.....	84
Tracing Back.....	84
Following Forward.....	85
Making Sense of Process Data.....	85
Within-Case Analysis.....	86
Cross-Case Analysis.....	87
Criteria for Assessing Research Quality: Trustworthiness .....	88
Blueprint for Empirical Case Descriptions .....	89
Summary .....	90
<b>Chapter 5   Positioning ABB.....</b>	<b>91</b>
About the Case Company .....	91
Brief History .....	91
Organizational Structure.....	92
Competitive Landscape.....	93
Brand Strategy .....	93
Brand Position and Perception.....	93
Brand Positioning at Corporate Level.....	94
Positioning a Multi-Domestic Firm (1988–1997).....	94
Brand Positioning Drivers.....	95
Brand Positioning Action.....	95
Brand Positioning Outcomes .....	97

Brand Positioning Challenges .....	97
Crisis, Turnaround, and Repositioning (2001–2005).....	99
Brand Positioning Drivers.....	100
Brand Positioning Action.....	100
Brand Positioning Outcomes .....	104
Brand Positioning Challenges .....	105
Business Stabilization and Repositioning (2007–2013) .....	106
Brand Positioning Drivers.....	107
Brand Positioning Action.....	108
Brand Positioning Outcomes .....	119
Brand Positioning Challenges .....	119
Brand Positioning at Business Level .....	121
ABB Force Measurement .....	121
Brand Positioning Drivers.....	122
Brand Positioning Action.....	127
Brand Positioning Outcomes .....	130
Brand Positioning Challenges .....	130
<b>Chapter 6   Positioning Trelleborg .....</b>	<b>132</b>
About the Case Company .....	132
Brief History .....	132
Organizational Structure.....	133
Competitive Landscape.....	134
Brand Strategy .....	134
Brand Position and Perception.....	135
Brand Positioning at Corporate Level.....	135
Brand Strategy Formation and Positioning (1999–2005) .....	135
Brand Positioning Drivers.....	136
Brand Positioning Action.....	137
Brand Positioning Outcomes .....	140
Brand Positioning Challenges .....	141
Strategic Reorientation and Repositioning (2011–2014) .....	142
Brand Positioning Drivers.....	142
Brand Positioning Action.....	145
Brand Positioning Outcomes .....	164
Brand Positioning Challenges .....	164
Brand Positioning at Business Level .....	166
Trelleborg Sealing Solutions Kalmar .....	166
Business Context.....	168
Brand Positioning Drivers.....	168
Brand Positioning Action.....	170
Brand Positioning Outcomes .....	175
Brand Positioning Challenges .....	175

<b>Chapter 7   Positioning Holmen .....</b>	<b>178</b>
About the Case Company .....	178
Brief History .....	178
Organizational Structure .....	179
Competitive Landscape .....	179
Brand Strategy .....	180
Brand Position and Perception .....	180
Brand Positioning at Holmen Corporate Level .....	181
Brand Positioning Drivers .....	181
Brand Positioning Action .....	183
Brand Positioning Outcomes .....	184
Brand Positioning Challenges .....	185
Brand Positioning at Business Level .....	186
Iggesund Paperboard .....	186
Invercote and Incada Brand Families .....	188
Business Context .....	191
Brand Position and Perception .....	192
Communication-Driven Repositioning (2006–2008) .....	193
Brand Positioning Drivers .....	193
Brand Positioning Action .....	195
Brand Positioning Outcomes .....	198
Brand Positioning Challenges .....	199
Technology-Driven Repositioning (2011–2014) .....	200
Brand Positioning Drivers .....	200
Brand Positioning Action .....	201
Brand Positioning Outcomes .....	204
Brand Positioning Challenges .....	204
<b>Chapter 8   Analysis .....</b>	<b>206</b>
Patterns of Positioning ABB, Trelleborg, and Holmen .....	207
Positioning ABB Over Time .....	207
Positioning Trelleborg Over Time .....	209
Positioning Holmen Over Time .....	211
Cross-Case Patterns of Corporate Brand Positioning .....	213
Location and Timing .....	213
Drivers .....	215
Corporate-Level Actions .....	218
Business-Level Actions .....	228
Outcomes .....	231
Practitioners and Practices .....	231
Corporate Brand Positioning Process Model .....	234
Conceptual Interpretation of Cross-Case Patterns .....	237



Positioning as Evolution and Revolution .....	237
Positioning as Institutionalized Life Cycles .....	239
Positioning as Purposeful Enactment .....	239
Positioning as Balancing Power Between Opposing Forces .....	240
Positioning as Managing Language and Dialogue .....	241
A Composite Understanding of Corporate Brand Positioning.....	242
<b>Chapter 9   Discussion .....</b>	<b>244</b>
Corporate Brand Positioning Location and Timing .....	244
Corporate Brand Positioning Drivers .....	245
Corporate Brand Positioning Action .....	247
Activities .....	247
Choices .....	248
Challenges.....	250
Corporate Brand Positioning Outcomes .....	251
Corporate Brand Positioning Practitioners and Practices.....	252
Market- and Brand-Oriented Positioning.....	255
Schools of Positioning Across Firm Levels and Over Time.....	256
Nuancing the Concepts of Market and Brand Orientation .....	257
<b>Chapter 10   Contributions .....</b>	<b>259</b>
Theoretical Contributions and Implications.....	259
Managerial Implications.....	266
Corporate-Level Brand Managers.....	266
Business-Level Brand Managers .....	268
Collaborative Positioning Across Firm Levels.....	270
Limitations and Future Research Directions.....	273
<b>References .....</b>	<b>276</b>

# Chapter 1 | Introduction

In principle, all established brands have a position. The actual position of a particular brand may be more or less clear in the market and for its key stakeholders, and it may be more or less matched with the brand owner's intentions. All of the brand owner's activities and choices (highlighting distinctive features of a brand, and making those attractive to the target audience) affect the brand's position; likewise, all activities and choices by others (such as competing brands' positioning efforts) potentially affect the brand's position. Thus, following a systematic and analytical process, positioning strategies are supposed to indicate the direction for the brand's marketing activities to achieve the goal of building strong brands and achieving or defending an intended position (Aaker, 1996; Aaker & Shansby, 1982; Esch, 2005, 2010; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 2012; Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2012). During such a process, identity (brand), relevance (target group), and differentiation (competitors) need to be matched (Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2012). Because of this, positioning is often referred to as the foundation of brand management (Esch, 2010).

Furthermore, it is important to conceptually distinguish between the terms 'position' and 'positioning': *position* describes the strategic choice of a position for a brand (intended position) and the resulting outcome (actual position); *positioning* is the management process that seeks to establish a new position in markets, and minds or modifies (fortifies or changes) an existing one. This distinction, even if seemingly self-explanatory, is far from clear in the field of brand management. Essentially, the interchangeable use of *position* and *positioning* in input (position types) and outcome (position effects) research is problematic. *Positioning* is inherently dynamic and needs to be demarcated from its static counterpart *position*. Thus we need to know what actually constitutes positioning dynamics to increase the concept's theoretical value and practical relevance. In consequence, a process description that takes activities, context, and the unescapable reality of time into account is fundamental to this endeavor.

However, much of existing brand position(ing) research has disregarded the activity, context, and time dimensions. Research on the *process of positioning brands* is both rare and insufficient (see, for a review, Chapter 2; see also Butt, Murphy, & Papadopoulos, 2007; Urde & Koch, forthcoming). The lack of a processual approach is surprising, both from a theoretical and practical viewpoint. Brand management researchers and practicing brand managers need to know more than the input factors

(types of strategies available) required to achieve intended position outcomes (types of potential effects); in fact, they need better insights into how ‘positioning journeys’ (that is position development processes) unfold. Uncovering such journeys is necessary for refining the positioning concept, which is widely used yet notably vague and, at times, misleading.

Positioning research also needs to be developed in a comprehensive *corporate brand context* (that is, branding at the organizational level), which has recently received increasing attention compared to its product brand counterpart. Reasons for this shift can be found in that organizations and institutions are forced to be more and more transparent, which makes hiding behind multiple product brands difficult (Balmer, 2010). The growing focus on shareholder value and the accompanying evaluations of brands in balance sheets and the stock exchanges also make a shared brand management (that is, corporate brand management) significant (Esch, 2010). This development elevates corporate brand management to be of key strategic importance: whereas the CEO has the ultimate responsibility for the corporate brand, everyone in an organization is assumed to have partial responsibility for it (Balmer, 1995; Greyser, 2009; Hatch & Schultz, 2003). The issue of positioning as a process, however, is only superficially addressed in extant corporate brand research. Considering corporate branding’s role as an increasingly important management practice (Gyrd-Jones, Merrilees, & Miller, 2013) as well as a notable socio-cultural phenomenon (Kornberger, 2010), it is therefore necessary to investigate how firms position their brand towards multiple stakeholders.

Industrial corporations are explicitly advised to consider their corporate brand as a key tool to maximize coherence and efficiency (Lambkin & Muzellec, 2010; Webster & Keller, 2004); yet, the issue of industrial corporate brand positioning has only received limited research attention. Compared to its practical importance, specifically in European economies, business-to-business (B2B) marketing issues are systematically underrepresented in marketing research (Kleinaltenkamp, 2010). Concerning brands and branding, too little is known, for example, about firm, market, or environmental factors that inhibit or facilitate corporate brand strategies in a B2B context (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011). A major challenge, especially for *industrial multi-business corporate brands* with many internal and external stakeholders, is to find a common denominator (that is, a commonly shared theme) for a meaningful position (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). Thus, the empirical context of industrial multi-business firms provides complex organizational settings that are promising for exploring the dynamics of corporate brand positioning across firm levels and over time.

Consider the US-based multinational technology company IBM as an example of a well-positioned B2B corporate brand. IBM has been consistently ranked as one of the world’s most innovative, profitable, and sustainable technology brands (Interbrand, 2012). Since 2008, the company has expanded its relevance with a corporate initiative focusing on smart systems to achieve economic growth, sustainable development, and

societal progress (IBM, 2013). The “Smarter Planet” conversations associated the brand with solutions to increasingly important social problems (Marketing Week, 2011). The initiative’s goal was to communicate IBM’s brand proposition beyond its traditional base of business clients, media, and shareholders; that is, to new targets such as public policy makers and consumers (PR Week Awards, 2010). Today, IBM continues to reposition itself in order to meet continually changing market needs, turning its attention to emerging markets, big data analytics, or cloud computing. IBM’s “Smarter Planet” brand positioning approach drives solution development, employee engagement, and corporate citizenship. According to global branding consultancy Interbrand, IBM is highly associated with trust, wisdom, and idealism (Interbrand, 2012). Yet, an ongoing challenge IBM faces is to eliminate stakeholder associations of the company as still making PCs. By communicating IBM’s function as being the backbone of society, the brand is helping the company earn a place in consumers’ hearts and minds, which in turn gives it greater credit and distinction with business customers (Marketing Week, 2011). Indicating straightforwardness and control, the IBM brand demonstrates the possibility of positioning a leading B2B brand (Interbrand, 2012; Millward Brown, 2014). In order to stay ahead of the competition, IBM needs to make sure it continues to deliver big, thought-provoking innovations, also ensuring it maintains its rich legacy of world-changing technological advancement in the spirit of creating a smarter planet (Interbrand, 2012).

The example of IBM shows the importance of being clearly positioned. What we do not know, however, is how a positioning development process unfolds. The present study will address several open questions to shed light on the positioning process: Why do corporate brands need to be positioned and repositioned over time? What firm-level activities, choices, and challenges occur in corporate brand positioning projects? Who is involved in developing corporate brand positioning strategies? From a managerial perspective, one might also ask how corporations can handle the complexity of successfully positioning corporate brands toward different stakeholders. Thus, the goal of the present study is *to better understand how corporate brand positioning occurs over time and across firm levels in industrial multi-business organizations*.

This introductory chapter sets the stage for my arguments by clarifying their background and pinpointing limitations of prior brand positioning and corporate branding research. Then, I will explicate the overall research aim and specific research question. A brief overview of the process-focused qualitative case study method and the case companies follows. Finally, I will outline the thesis structure.



## Brand Positioning – From Content to Process

In the early 1970s, Ries and Trout published a series of articles on positioning in the U.S. trade magazine 'Advertising Age'. They elaborated their thinking in a best-selling book called 'Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind'; it argued that in an "over-communicated society," in which the volume of commercial messages far exceeds the individual's mental processing capacity, marketers must focus on how to get into the minds of consumers. Doing so requires making challenging decisions about how a brand might stand out from its competitors and how it might be perceived as superior on a consumer choice dimension (Ries & Trout, 2001). This "mind-share" perspective became the common leitmotif in textbooks on marketing management (Holt, 2004), where brand positioning is normally discussed in relation to segmentation, targeting, and communication. The essence of mind-share positioning is simplicity and persistence; it distills the diverse features of a product or service, its competitors, and the marketplace into a simple, easily understood message. A company's marketing communications focus should then be on developing the positioning proposition in a consistent and congruent way, so as to occupy a distinct place in the minds of the consumer (Hooley et al., 2008; Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman, & Hansen, 2009; Ries & Trout, 2001; Rossiter & Percy, 1997). This supposedly requires "analytical ability, patience, creativity, imagination and sheer instinct – but above all, it demands wisdom" (Brooksbank, 1994, p. 14). The primary positioning perspective is externally oriented, referring to market-driven strategy (Jaworski, Kohli, & Sahay, 2000; Louro & Cunha, 2001). Only recently has the positioning of a brand moved closer to its identity (de Chernatony, 2009, 2010; Kapferer, 2012; Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2012). From this perspective, positioning takes advantage of a specific aspect of identity, at a given point in time, in a given market, and against a defined set of competitors (Kapferer, 2012). An identity approach helps to reinforce the meaning behind a brand for customer and non-customer stakeholders, and provides the opportunity to develop the brand's position with a strategic approach to brand management (de Chernatony, 2010). In essence, making a well-considered position choice that is grounded in identity can be the start of product or service innovation, design strategy, employee motivation, and the communication and image-building process (Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2012). These conceptualizations of positioning as principally driven by image and a market orientation (traditional perspective) or identity and a brand orientation (emergent perspective) enable approaching the concept from two meta-theoretical perspectives: market-oriented positioning and brand-oriented positioning (Urde & Koch, forthcoming; see, for a more detailed review, Chapter 2).

Both of these meta-theoretical approaches are, however, based on a 'position typology fixation' where the predominant understanding of the brand manager's role is to make "razor-sharp" position choices (Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2012, p. 166). Over the years, positioning typologies have applied different perspectives that range

from conceptual (Aaker & Shansby, 1982; Wind, 1982, 1990) to empirical (Crawford, 1985; Easingwood & Mahajan, 1989). Positioning typologies can also be managerial- (Hooley & Saunders, 1993; Hooley, Broderick, & Möller, 1998) or customer-derived (Blankson & Kalafatis, 2004; Diwan & Bodla, 2011). In other words, a specific typology can be based on positioning dimensions from an organizational perspective (such as low price versus high price, premium quality versus basic quality, innovation versus imitation), or on how customers perceive positioning dimensions (such as top of range, value for money, attractiveness). Positioning typologies are important, since they identify strategies (input factors) and influence the understanding of the concept and its operationalization. Besides this focus on *input* factors, marketing scholars have mostly understood positioning as an important brand management *outcome* (see, for example, Kalra & Goodstein, 1998; Pechmann & Ratneshwar, 1991; Sujan & Bettman, 1989) with a major focus on advertising effectiveness (Kalafatis, Tsogas, & Blankson, 2000). The dominant static research approaches on both input factors (such as typologies) and outcomes (such as advertising effectiveness) are important; yet, they remain silent regarding the dynamic (that is, processual) aspects of positioning brands. However, this is important, since findings that point toward a brand's performance based on either intended position characteristic A (found to perform bad) or B (found to perform good) say little about *how* to go about moving from A to B. This is important if we want to know what constitutes positioning journeys. Thus, I concur with the understanding of process as a developmental event sequence vis-à-vis how things evolve over time as well as why they evolve in a certain manner (Langley, 1999, 2011; Pettigrew, 1992, 1997; Van de Ven, 1992, 2007; Van de Ven & Poole, 1990).

Process approaches have been more widely utilized in fields other than brand management, for example *organizational change* (see, for example, Denis, Langley, & Cazale, 1996; Pettigrew, 1985; Sonenshein, 2010) or *strategy formation* (see, for example, Burgelman, 1996; Farjoun, 2002; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). In this respect, exploring brand positioning's dynamic aspects is likely to benefit from the experiences of other fields. Particularly, the processual theorist idea of seeing strategy or change as an outcome of individuals' power along with negotiated and political relations (March, 1962; Pettigrew, 1985), or as emergent rather than deliberate (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985), is an important perspective in adjusting the general conception of change or strategy as solely based on rational inputs and outputs.

## Corporate Brand Positioning – From Static to Dynamic

Corporate brands are distinguishable from product brands in terms of their complexity, foundation in organizational values, and higher strategic priority (Gyrd-Jones, Merrilees, & Miller, 2013). Their basic aims – namely differentiating and

creating preference – are, however, often seen as equal (de Chernatony, 2002; Muzellec & Lambkin, 2009). The term *corporate brand* signals that an organization underpins the brand (King, 1991; Balmer, 1995, 2001; Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Expressed in language, the, “company will typically speak of itself as ‘we’, internally and in public discourse, while customers and other stakeholders will speak of it as ‘they’. A product brand, on the other hand, will be called ‘it’ by everyone” (Urde, 2013, p. 743). Unlike the product brand, the corporate brand concept has multidisciplinary roots, a broad scope, and involves multiple stakeholders (Gyrd-Jones, Merrilees, & Miller, 2013). Moreover, corporate branding pulls from identity concepts (derived from inside the organization) rather than from image concepts (derived from outside the organization), as in product branding. Balmer (2010, p. 181), for example, argued that corporate brand identities are quintessentially a perceptual or cognitive construct, although they are derived from an institution’s identity anchors: corporate brand identities exist in people’s minds, while corporate identities inhabit organizations. Corporate branding also focuses both on top management’s aspiration for the brand (King, 1991) and the employees and/or stakeholders’ view of the brand (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Thus, corporate branding challenges are grounded mainly in the paradox of integrating competitive market positioning and internal cohesion among stakeholders (Gyrd-Jones, Merrilees, & Miller, 2013).

Importantly, corporate branding is strongly defined as a management practice that serves as an agent for the organization (Gyrd-Jones, Merrilees, & Miller, 2013). Considering corporate branding’s role as a management practice, it is surprising that research focusing on its dynamic aspects, such as its formation or maintenance, is rare (see, for a review, Chapter 2; see also Balmer, 2010; Melewar, Gotsi, & Andriopoulos, 2012; Miller, Merrilees, & Yakimova, 2014). Some studies have recently shifted towards a highly needed process perspective (see, for example, Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander, & Laine, 2011; Schultz & Hatch, 2003; Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2011; Wallström, Karlsson, & Salehi-Sangari, 2008), but do not specifically focus on the role of positioning. In the corporate brand context, some scholars refer to positioning as constructing the corporate brand (Knox & Bickerton 2003), while others understand it as a strategic function creating differentiation points in relation to competitors, but also aspects of collective corporate brand membership (Hatch & Schultz, 2008). Urde (2013, p. 753) related the external corporate brand element ‘position’ to the internal element ‘mission & vision’, suggesting the need “to align the organisation’s reason for being and its direction with the intended position”. These examples imply that the input and outcome fixation of the positioning concept has been adapted to the corporate brand phenomenon, leaving unclear *how* corporate brand positioning and repositioning processes occur over time. In the present thesis, I aim to remediate this limitation by exploring corporate brand positioning development as a sequence of firm-level events. Seriously considering time as a research lens will allow for more in-depth investigations of

firms' responses to external or internal changes (Melewar et al., 2012; Lee, 2013; Yakimova & Beverland, 2005), and will offer more realistic insights of what actually happens.

## **Industrial Multi-Business Firm Context**

To date, positioning research is well established in a product branding context, with much of the research focusing on fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2012; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). In that context, positioning deals mostly with a single product, a single target audience, and a single proposition. However, these assumptions are increasingly unrealistic, as nowadays the reality for brands (of any kind) is multiplicity: multiple products and services from one brand, multiple target audiences (stakeholders), or multiple need states (Jowitt & Lury, 2012). While this has long been a reality for industrial corporations operating with a multitude of products and services in the name of one corporate brand, positioning industrial corporate brands has received limited research attention. However, there is strong support generally for the notion that industrial brands represent valuable resources that can help to increase a firm's competitive advantage (Baumgarth, 2010; Beverland et al., 2007; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006; Lambkin & Muzellec, 2010; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011; Lindgreen, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2010; McQuiston, 2004; Mudambi, Doyle, & Wong, 1997; Ward, Goldstine, & Light, 1999). Some of the world's strongest brands, such as DuPont, IBM, Intel, General Electric, or Siemens, are operating in B2B environments (Webster & Keller, 2004) and chose to apply a corporate brand strategy for their multiple businesses. In the context of multi-business firms particularly, where a corporation is structured around modular business units focusing on particular products, customers, or geographies (Martin & Eisenhardt, 2010; Paroutis & Pettigrew, 2007), there is a lack of corporate brand-positioning-related research. Thus, this research context would allow for investigating questions such as how a corporate brand's position and its products are connected (Kapferer, 2012, p. 175), who has custody and control for brand positioning strategies (Beverland, Napoli & Lindgreen, 2007), and why there are potential difficulties in establishing a clear and meaningful position (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). Studying positioning coordination activities at multiple organizational levels representing different contexts is important for understanding what actually constitutes corporate brand positioning dynamics.

# This Study

The initial literature review emphasized limitations to understanding the dynamics in brand positioning and corporate branding. On these grounds, I established the study's theoretical and practical relevance to investigate the corporate brand positioning process. I will now explicate the overall research aim and specific research question, followed by a brief overview of the process-focused qualitative case study method and the case company choice.

## *Research Aim and Question*

The aim of this thesis is *to explore the process of corporate brand positioning in industrial multi-business firms.*

More specifically, this thesis will provide answers to the question: *How does corporate brand positioning occur over time?*

In answering this question, the present thesis will investigate what constitutes the corporate brand positioning journey as in *where* and *when* positioning occurs (that is, location and timing), *why* it occurs (that is, drivers), *what* occurs (that is, activities, choices, and challenges), and *who* is involved (that is, actors and their roles). Furthermore, the deep generative processes and structures (that is, mechanisms) having caused corporate brand positioning events to occur will be highlighted. By doing so, I aim to understand and explain the interplay between managerial agency and structural constraint over time. Thus, investigating 'what remains the same' and 'what changes' over time becomes central in answering the research question. Based on case studies of multi-business firms operating in B2B markets, I will answer the research question.

I intend to simultaneously contribute to and with theory development and practical relevance. As for theoretical contributions I intend to offer a better understanding of positioning in a corporate branding context of multi-business firms. This includes the aforementioned more realistic insights into the process of positioning, uncovering the mechanisms of positioning change and continuity over time and across firm levels. As for practical contributions, I aim to identify challenges and pitfalls of the positioning management process on corporate and business levels.

## *Case Study Method*

This study adopts a process-focused qualitative case study design (Eisenhardt, 1989; Langley, 2011; Yin, 2009). In order to allow for an in-depth exploration from various perspectives, both retrospective and real-time case studies were conducted, partly utilizing longitudinal elements. The intention was to capture the impact of internal and external changes on positioning and repositioning strategies. Dawson (2012, p. 120) defined process research on change as “the contextual, retrospective and real-time study of change as-it-happens over time through the observed, documented and lived experiences of people as they seek to make sense and give sense individually and collectively to decision and non-decision making activities...”; this implies that in researching how central actors make sense of, and give sense to, corporate brand positioning, I aim to understand such actors’ conceptions of the activities in which they are engaged, and their reasons for doing so (Fleetwood, 2005). Process research on change further focuses on “...the actions and torpidity of others, the multiple stories that transform and compete over time, and the events and critical incidents that occur in expected and unexpected ways” (Dawson, 2012, p. 120). In the context of the present thesis, multiple brand stories would refer to manager sensemaking and sense-giving on different organizational levels (such as corporate and business), and at different points in time (retrospective or real-time). This perspective on the process of change is likely to illuminate how corporate brand positioning evolves over time. Focusing the investigation on both corporate-level and business-unit-levels of the same organization emphasizes dialectic managerial views, involves organizing processes through corporate- and business-level strategic initiatives, and highlights mutual influences (Hutzschenreuter & Kleindienst, 2006).

By adopting a critical realism philosophical position (for a detailed methodology discussion, see Chapter 4), I aim to substantiate the chosen case research method. Critical realism is particularly well-suited as a companion to case research, and requires thoughtful, in-depth research with the objective of understanding why things are as they are (Easton, 2010). It is particularly suitable for process-focused case research, as it requires the researcher to provide analytically structured historical accounts of specific “transition processes and their outcomes” (Reed, 2005, p. 1638).

## *Case Companies*

Three decentralized global industrial multi-business firms, employing varying corporate brand strategy degrees, provide the context for corporate brand positioning cases. The case companies are *ABB* (power and automation industry), *Trelleborg* (polymer engineering industry), and *Holmen* (pulp and paper industry); all three companies are typical in their manner of positioning a corporate brand that relates to different customer groups and multiple customer and non-customer stakeholders

across their numerous business and product divisions. Moreover, all three offer unique insights to generate detailed qualitative data to extend the understanding of corporate- and business-level positioning processes, and how they unfold over time. Due to their organizational structure (decentralized business units and numerous product areas), these corporate brands pose a promising outlook on illustrating many of the complexities I seek to investigate. Additionally, the chosen corporations increasingly consider brand strategy as a key tool to configure and reconfigure their businesses and to maximize coherence and efficiency (Lambkin & Muzellec, 2010). They also offer a context where managerial thinking has been found to, or is in, the process of shifting from a product-centric approach to a more promise-centric one (creating a set of expectations to offer a certain type and level of value) in regards to positioning (McQuiston, 2004). Considering the volatile conditions that are characteristic of industrial markets, the three case companies deem a brand-centric business model as relevant, as customers prefer a company that has a deep understanding of their needs (Ward et al., 1999).

## Thesis Outline

This thesis has 10 chapters, which are organized as follows:

*Chapter 1* introduces the thesis by outlining the research's context, relevance, previous research shortcomings, as well as the research aim and question. *Chapter 2* reviews relevant literature on brand positioning and corporate branding, in order to establish the current state of knowledge in the field. A review of organizational change and strategy formation process and practice studies provides insights into management dynamics. *Chapter 3* develops and presents a research model that holistically guides the empirical investigation of corporate brand positioning processes. *Chapter 4* explicates the qualitative process-focused case study methodology applied in the context of researching corporate- and business-level brand positioning in industrial multi-business firms. *Chapters 5–7* examine case studies in the context of ABB, Trelleborg, and Holmen. The studies investigate how corporate-level and business units independently and interactively shape positioning processes over time in corporate brand building. *Chapter 8* analyzes the findings within and across cases guided by the research question. It highlights corporate brand positioning patterns as well as mechanisms and introduces a corporate brand positioning process model. *Chapter 9* discusses the findings in the light of previous research and existing theories. *Chapter 10* concludes the thesis and highlights theoretical contributions and implications. Finally, this concluding chapter provides role-relevant managerial implications, and reflects upon the study's limitations and future research opportunities.

# Chapter 2 | Theoretical Framework

This chapter aims to position the purpose of the present study in relevant theoretical discussions and perspectives. First, I outline existing theories of brand positioning and how the concept has been understood. Second, I summarize relevant literature on corporate brands and corporate branding. Third, I review how the positioning and corporate brand constructs have been understood in combination. Finally, and as a response to the lack of a processual approach in brand management literature, I review some potentially relevant process and practice studies of organizational change and strategy formation in order to sharpen my theoretical tools for investigating the dynamics of corporate brand positioning in multi-business firms.

## Positioning

The roots of the Latin-derived noun *position* lie in the study of logic and philosophy: to *posit* is to assert a proposition or thesis for affirmation. The position of an object is its spatial location, or its appropriate place within a context. Edward Chamberlin, an American economist, pointed towards what would become a major paradox of contemporary branding and positioning decisions, already in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: finding the balance between points-of-parity (brand sameness) and points-of-difference (brand differentiation). Chamberlin referred to this as “double movement” (as cited in Callon, Méadel, & Rabeharisoa, 2002): singularizing goods on the one hand, and making them comparable to other existing goods on the other hand (Callon et al., 2002, p. 201); in other words, “defining a good means positioning it in a space of goods, in a system of difference and similarities, of distinct yet connected categories” (Callon et al., 2002, p. 198). In the marketing discipline, brand positioning can be traced back to the unique selling proposition (USP), developed in the 1950s by Rosser Reeves of the Ted Bates advertising agency as a key element of advertising strategy (Holt, 2004; Keller, 2012). The logic behind it was that every product must diligently communicate a single distinctive benefit to its customers (Keller, 2012; Holt, 2004; Hooley, Piercy, & Nicoulaud, 2008). As elaborated upon in the introduction, it was Ries and Trout’s best-selling book ‘Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind’ that popularized positioning in theory and practice. The authors argued that in an “over-communicated society,” in which the volume of commercial messages far exceeds the individual’s mental processing capacity, marketers must focus



on how to get into the minds of consumers (Ries & Trout, 2001). Holt (2004) described this perspective as the “mind-share” approach that had become the common leitmotif in marketing research and practice.

### ***Positioning and Brand Management***

During the process of positioning a brand, four essential questions should be answered (Kapferer, 2012, p. 180): ‘For whom?’ (segmentation); ‘In the market of?’ (definition of served market); ‘Promising?’ (definition of key brand core element); and ‘Proven by?’ (supporting proof to the value proposition). This means that the concept of positioning is often discussed in relation to segmentation, targeting, and communication. Segmentation considers variables for segmenting markets (Dibb & Simkin, 1991). These segmentation variables can be based on socio-demographics, psychographics, benefits, attitudes, channels, occasions, or price. In business-to-business environments, markets can also be segmented according to the decision-making process of the key influencer in buying the brand. In general, the organization of the brand portfolio reflects the type of market segmentation chosen by the company (Kapferer, 2012). In this way, targeting means deciding on which and how many segments to target before determining an intended position for the brand (Dibb & Simkin, 1991). Once a positioning strategy is found, integrated marketing communication then aims to ensure consistency in delivering the positioning strategy (Duncon & Moriarty, 1998; Reid, Luxton, & Mavondo, 2005). In other words, integrated marketing communication will be the “reality test” for brand strategy and implementation of an intended position (Merrilees, 2005, p. 208).

In managing and positioning different types of brands, the brand platform defines its key elements (Kapferer, 2012). The long-term brand policy specifies the strategic intent or the position that the brand aims to occupy, and the values and promises it represents. In practice, ‘brand positioning statements’ typically summarize a story that supports the brand and shows how internal and external stakeholders should see the brand’s position (Aaker, 1996; de Chernatony, 2010; Keller, 2012; Urde, 2003). The reasoning behind platform thinking is to understand the common elements that connect a firm’s offerings, markets, and processes, while exploiting these commonalities to create leveraged growth and variety (Sawhney, 1998). According to Kapferer (2012), the brand platform aims at compromising all brand identity aspects represented by the identity prism (a brand’s personality, culture, self-image, reflection, relationship, and physique) as well as the brand’s intended position. Finding and choosing the elements for a brand platform can be seen as a crucial activity in a brand positioning process. In this context, platform thinking allows firms “to exploit synergies among brands, to minimize overlap among brand identities, and to achieve coherence and clarity of positioning across the product family” (Sawhney, 1998, p. 59).

### *Image-Driven Positioning*

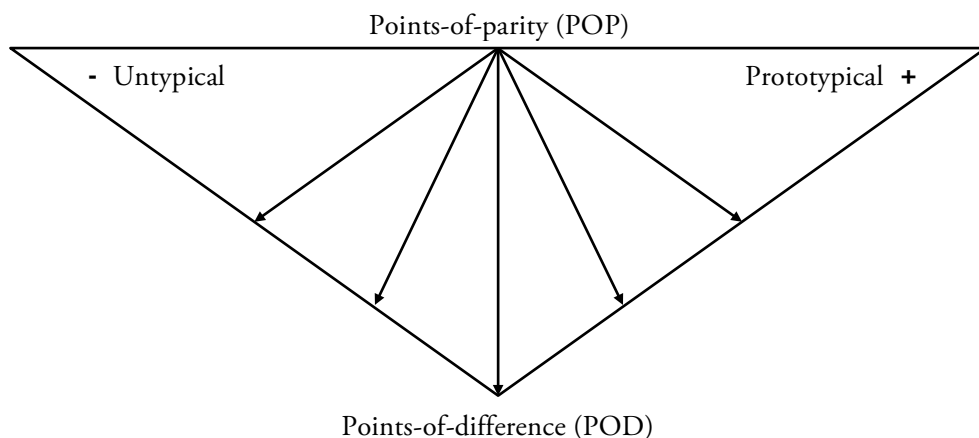
An image perspective on positioning is particularly relevant for consumer product branding, and builds on the scientific tradition of cognitive psychology (Heding, Knudtzen, & Bjerre, 2009). It recognizes that the actual power in constructing a brand resides in the minds of consumers and in what they have learned and experienced of the brand over time (Keller & Lehmann, 2009). Hence, positioning from this perspective essentially concerns *consumer knowledge*. A considerable amount of brand positioning research focuses on such consumer psychology issues and categorization approaches by assessing brand position *evaluations* by consumers, thereby providing brand managers with insights on what to highlight when positioning brands (Jewell & Barone, 2007; Pham & Muthukrishnan, 2002; Punj & Moon, 2002).

The ‘brand concept management framework’ (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986) was developed to guide the selection, implementation, and control of a brand image over time. Its originators proposed that a formal, long-term brand concept is an investment that can potentially deliver sustained competitive advantage. During the selection, introduction, elaboration, and fortification processes of the brand concept, the framework would prescribe specific positioning strategies and decisions based on functional (such as Clorox bleach), symbolic (such as Brooks Brothers shirts), or experiential (such as LEGO building blocks) brand meanings. The framework would also permit flexibility in implementation during the lifecycle of the brand. Empirical research confirms that brand functionality and symbolism are distinct concepts in consumer perceptions, and can be used together (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). What unites image-driven approaches to positioning is their focus on brand associations providing the source for brand images (Keller, 1993); in other words, “determining the desired brand knowledge structures involves positioning a brand” (Keller, 2012, p. 109). One fundamental choice in the brand positioning strategy process is whether to create a position that is credible *or* aspirational (Aaker, 2008a). Determining goals for an intended position requires the brand manager to choose between functional *or* emotional characteristics for the intended position of the brand, depending on the involvement of the target group (Esch, 2010).

Besides the aforementioned *benefit* aspect (functional, symbolic, or experimental), product- and non-product-related attributes, along with attitudes, are sources of brand associations (Keller, 2012). Product- and non-product-related *attributes* can be tangible or intangible (Sattler & Völckner, 2007). De Chernatony (2010), for example, speaks about a powerful brand position that is based on functionalism and is ideally centered on one functional attribute. Yet, non-product-related attributes, in the form of brand personality dimensions, can be demarcated. Brand personality attributes are not necessarily related to functional attributes (such as physical or technical) and are often illustrated in the form of brand experience positions (Sattler & Völckner, 2007). Recently, the importance of brand *attitudes* has increased; initiatives and achievements in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability

work are often utilized to trigger attitudinal brand associations. Studies dealing with a brand's social initiatives in conjunction with positioning highlight the attitude category of brand associations in positioning strategies and position outcomes (Anselmsson & Johansson, 2007; Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2007).

Positioning, then, involves highlighting such distinctive features of a brand and making them attractive to customers and non-customer stakeholders. Keller (2012) points out that the terms *points of parity* (similar features shared by all competitors) and *points of difference* (distinct brand aspects) describe what must be balanced to influence consumers' perceptions. Points of difference are those associations "that are unique to the brand that are also strongly held and favorably evaluated by consumers" (Keller, 2012, p. 117). The more abstract and the higher the level of association (that is attributes, benefits, associations), the more likely these differentiating points are to be sustained sources of brand equity (Keller, 1993). Brand intangibles are a common means by which marketers differentiate their brands with consumers and cover a wide range of actual or aspirational user imagery (Park et al., 1986; Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Points of parity are those associations "that are not necessarily unique to the brand but may in fact be shared with other brands" (Keller, 2012, p. 117). Keller further notes that two basic forms can be distinguished within points of parity. Category point-of-parity associations are those associations "that consumers view as being necessary to be a legitimate and credible product offering within a certain category". Consequently, this type of associations stands for necessary though not sufficient conditions of brand choice. Competitive point-of-parity associations are those associations "designed to negate competitors' points of difference". This means that in case a brand can 'break even' in areas where competitors are trying to find an advantage, *and* can achieve advantages in some other relevant area, the brand can be in a strong and competitive position (Keller, 2012, p. 118). Figure 1 illustrates the challenge and paradox of finding a balance between difference (points of difference) and sameness (points of parity). Starting at the top center of the inverted triangle means equating the brand to the product class (being a 'jack-of-all-trades'; trying to please everyone). Moving horizontally towards the right (prototypical) or the left (untypical) means making positive position choices to signal being the archetype of the category (far right) or making negative choices (offsetting the brand against the category) while still using the associations people have with the category to position the brand (far left). The vertical dimension signals that the further down a brand is supposed to be positioned in the triangle, the more aspects of differentiation at the expense of sameness are emphasized.



**Figure 1**

Positioning paradox with field of tension (adopted from Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2012)

### *Identity-Driven Positioning*

An important development in the field of strategic brand management relates the positioning of a brand to its identity (de Chernatony, 2009, 2010; Kapferer, 2012; Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2012). This perspective builds on the scientific tradition of socio-economic interpretivism (Heding et al., 2009). Making a well-considered position choice on the basis of brand identity is the start of product or service innovation, design strategy, employee motivation, and the entire communication and image-building process (Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2012). Brand identity summarizes the vision, key beliefs, core values, and extended values of a product, service, or organization (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2012; Urde, 2003); positioning takes advantage of a specific aspect of identity at a given point in time, in a given market, and against a defined set of competitors. This perspective highlights the general understanding of positioning's role to “not reveal all the brand's richness of meaning nor reflect all of its potential”, while “brand identity provides the framework for overall brand coherence” (Kapferer, 2012, p. 154). Hence, from this perspective, positioning is essentially about *internal knowledge*. Emphasizing the brands' identity supports more integrated thinking regarding several components that are comprised of vision, culture, positioning, presentation, personality, and diverse forms of relationships. This approach helps to reinforce the meaning behind a brand for customer and non-customer stakeholders, and provides the opportunity to develop the brand's position in a better way and with a more strategic approach to brand management (de Chernatony, 2010, p. 54). Moreover, brand identity should provide a value proposition to the customer that is constructed around functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits (Aaker, 1996), as well as participatory benefits (such as co-

creation), in order to increase the intimacy between brand and customer (Ind, Iglesias, & Schultz, 2013). Value propositions need to be actively communicated on the grounds of an internally developed positioning strategy (Aaker, 1996). Communicating value propositions can be based on four position typology categories: *organization-based*, *product-based*, *marketing-variable-based*, and *receiver-based* (Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2012, p. 103). Corporate ability, mentality, or employee aspects can be part of an organization-based approach; prototypical claims, product features, and national benefits are options in a product-based approach; price, distribution, design, and name awareness can be part of marketing-variable-based approaches; finally, target group, situation, emotional benefit, and value are options in a receiver-based approach.

Introducing identity into the discussion of strategic brand management broadens the research area, contributing to alternative perspectives on positioning and emphasizing the idea of defining an identity-based position for long-term brand management.

### ***Positioning and Strategic Management***

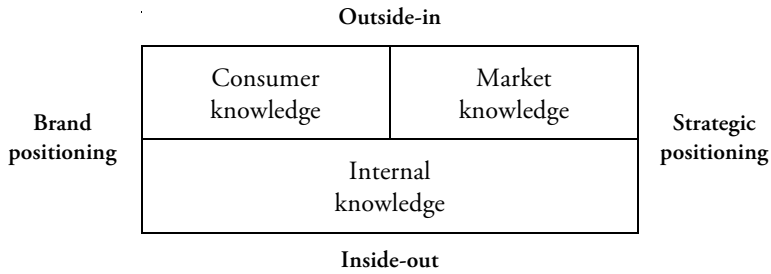
The discussion of *competitive positioning* in strategic management goes back to the mid-1960s, when ‘strategy’ began to develop as an independent discipline (Leavy, 2003). The competitive positioning approach is associated with Porter’s seminal work on generic strategies and competitive advantage. The key to strategy formulation is coping with industry competition (de Wit & Meyer, 2010; Porter, 1980, 1985). Strategy is at the very core of general management, defining the firm’s position and creating a good fit among activities by making trade-offs (Porter, 1996). Competitive positioning is an analytical process emphasizing external conditions of industry, competition, and customer needs. In principal, two questions must be asked: ‘Where will the firm compete?’, which refers to the target market, and ‘How will the firm compete?’, which refers to a differential advantage (Attia & Hooley, 2007, p. 92). Thus, Porter defined strategic positioning as “performing different activities from rivals” or “performing similar activities in different ways” (1996, p. 62). Hence, positioning from this external strategy perspective is essentially about *market knowledge*. Other perspectives (such as learning, culture, or power), emphasizing internal aspects of strategy, balance strategic management of competitive positions (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 2009). Competitive positioning decisions therefore need to incorporate market needs and company resources serving those needs (Grant, 2013; Hooley et al., 1998). Combining the competitive positioning literature (a primarily external perspective) with the firm’s resource-based view (a primarily internal perspective) helps identifying critical resources to attain certain competitive positions (Attia & Hooley, 2007; Hooley & Greenley, 2005). Studies on marketing resources and competitive positions reveal a need for clear positioning strategies to prevent ‘stuck in the middle’ outcomes (Hooley et al., 2008); brands as

resources can provide a sustainable competitive advantage to a company if they are “characterized by value, rarity, durability, inappropriability, imperfect imitability, and imperfect substitutability” (Balmer & Gray, 2003, p. 991). Branding activities that lead to high levels of reputation are, among others, useful tools to defend a position if the continuation of and support for protecting that reputation is secured (Hooley et al., 1998; Hooley & Greenley, 2005). Hence, positioning from this internal strategy (resource) perspective is essentially about *internal knowledge*.

In a strategic sense, a brand is likely to determine initiatives and actions taken by the firm (Esch, 2010). However, two cases are distinguishable. First, a firm might follow the basic principle of assigning brand strategy the role of the visible implementation of the corporate strategy. In this case, the brand strategy would be the face of the corporate strategy, as indicated by Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000). In the worst case-scenario, this would mean that the brand strategy has to change when the corporate strategy changes; in turn, this would lead to the negative consequence of confusion of customer and non-customer stakeholders. Second, the brand could be assigned a more leading role in the sense that brand strategy is driving corporate strategy; in this case, the brand is seen as a strategic hub that guides business and brand decisions (Esch, 2010; Urde, 1999). This distinction is important, especially when discussing the process of positioning and the relationship between corporate and brand strategy.

### ***Principal Conceptualizations and Applications***

The literature review identifies the main conceptualizations and applications of the positioning concept. In brand management terms, the discussion traditionally revolves around selecting, implementing, and controlling brand image over time, with more recent research studies in that context emphasizing the relationship between brand identity and brand position. The strategic management perspective elevates positioning to the status of a general managerial concern, related to achieving sustained competitive advantage by positioning a firm within its industry sector and/or on the basis of its internal resources and capabilities. The inside-out, resource-based view of the firm, with its focus on skills, knowledge, processes, relationships or outputs, has increasingly come to influence the strategic-management field (de Wit & Meyer, 2010). Figure 2 visualizes positioning’s principal conceptualizations and applications on the basis of the concept of knowledge. While an outside-in approach towards brand positioning results in consumer knowledge, it results in market knowledge from a strategic positioning understanding. An inside-out approach leads to internal knowledge for both brand and strategic positioning.



**Figure 2**

Positioning orientation and types of knowledge generation

Following the overview of principal conceptualizations and applications of positioning in branding and strategy, two meta-theoretical approaches to understand the concept can be identified: market-oriented positioning and brand-oriented positioning (Urde & Koch, forthcoming). The differentiation is centered on whether positioning is seen from an outside-in (market orientation) or an inside-out (brand orientation) perspective. This distinction is relevant in relation to how an *intended position* is defined, and how the *positioning process* is developed and implemented.

### ***Market-Oriented and Brand-Oriented Positioning***

An organization's approach to its marketplace, brand resources, and strategy may, to varying degrees, be market-oriented and/or brand-oriented (Ewing & Napoli, 2005; Gyrd-Jones, Helm, & Munk, 2013; Lee, 2013; Gromark & Melin, 2011; Reid et al., 2005; Urde, Baumgarth, & Merrilees, 2011; Wallace, 2013; Wong & Merrilees, 2007). Balancing these two synergistic approaches is both a theoretical and managerial challenge. The mindset of a particular organization will reflect the conceptualization of its brands, their fundamental functions, and how they are managed and presented to their marketplace (Baumgarth, Merrilees, & Urde, 2013). The quintessential brand versus market orientation question delineates two paradigms: in managing its brand(s), to what extent should an organization be guided by its identity; and to what extent should it be responsive to others' views and wishes? These questions can be extended to discuss the positioning concept (Urde & Koch, forthcoming): in positioning its brand(s), to what extent should an organization be guided by its identity; and to what extent should it respond to others' views and wishes?

Satisfying the needs and wants of customer and non-customer stakeholders is the foundation of a *market orientation* (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Shapiro, 1988; Slater, 1997; Venkatesan & Kumar, 2004). Brand image is key and is defined from the outside-in; in other words, the organization responds to needs and wants in its market(s) and of individual customers (Urde et al., 2011).

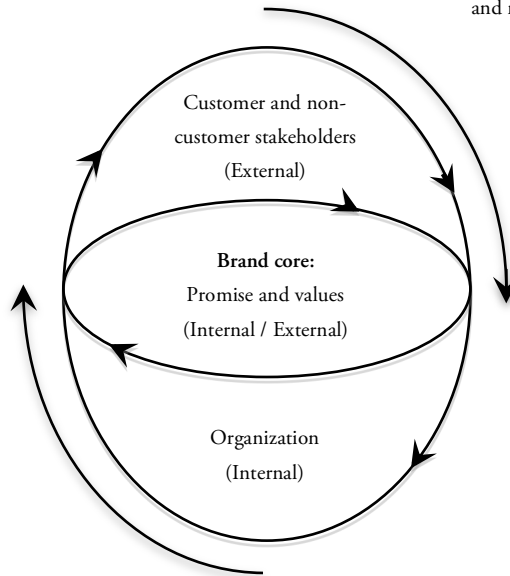
In *brand orientation*, satisfying the needs and wants of the customer and non-customer stakeholders occurs within the boundaries of the brand's identity. The clarity of the brand identity is key, and is defined from the inside-out. Brand orientation is defined as "an approach in which the processes of the organization revolve around the creation, development, and protection of brand identity in an ongoing interaction with target customers [and non-customer stakeholders] with the aim of achieving lasting competitive advantages in the form of brands" (Urde, 1999, p. 117).

In essence, market orientation (outside-in) and brand orientation (inside-out) represent different points of departure in understanding, defining, and managing brands. These two paradigms apply to different types of organizations (such as commercial corporations, nonprofit organizations, or institutions), brand structures (such as house of brands or branded house), and brands (such as product, place, or corporate). This paradigmatic approach also influences the definition of the brand's position (Urde & Koch, forthcoming). Following the same line of reasoning, the choice of paradigm also influences the positioning process (relevant to different types of organizations, brand structures, and brands). Figure 3 schematically depicts market-oriented and brand-oriented positioning; it illustrates the continuous interaction between the organization (internal), the brand (internal/external), and customer and non-customer stakeholders (external). The two bold arrows represent the two approaches. In market-oriented positioning (arrow to the right), the customer and non-customer stakeholders are essential in forming and positioning the brand, and the focus is an outside-in perspective and the image. However, in brand-oriented positioning (arrow to the left), the inside-out perspective is more important; the organizational identity and its value foundation are part of the brand identity. The response to the marketplace is not unconditional (Urde, 1999, p. 130), but is influenced by the boundaries set by the brand's core identity. With this approach, an organization may choose *not* to opt for a certain position with reference to its brand's identity. Similarly, an organization may purposely strive for a position in the marketplace that matches its essence. Market-oriented and brand-oriented positioning is part of a new terminology, and is an alternative way of categorizing existing position and positioning research contributions (Urde & Koch, forthcoming).



### Market-oriented positioning (MOP)

An outside-in approach with brand image in focus. Positioning the brand to satisfy the needs and wants of the customer and non-customer stakeholders.



### Brand-oriented positioning (BOP)

An inside-out approach with brand identity in focus. Positioning the brand to satisfy the needs and wants of the customer and non-customer stakeholders – *within* the boundaries of its identity.

## Figure 3

Approaches to positioning (adopted from Urde & Koch, forthcoming)

### Market-Oriented Positioning

“Market-oriented positioning is an outside-in approach that defines and implements an intended position with brand image as its point of departure and continuing frame of reference” (Urde & Koch, forthcoming). The brand image, as perceived by customers and non-customer stakeholders, is the focus of this positioning approach.

For example, Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman, and Hansen (2009, p. 361) built on Ries and Trout’s work to define positioning as the “act of designing the company’s offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the minds of the target market.” Kotler asserted that positioning results in “the successful creation of a customer-

focused value proposition, a cogent reason why the target market should buy the product.” Kotler’s definition is a prime example of market-oriented positioning. Keller’s definition of the concept is also market-oriented: “Brand positioning is all about creating the optimal location in the minds of existing and potential customers so that they think of the brand in the ‘right way’” (1999, p. 44).

### *Brand-Oriented Positioning*

“Brand-oriented positioning is an inside-out approach that defines and implements an intended position with brand identity as its point of departure and continuing frame of reference” (Urde & Koch, forthcoming). This implies that satisfying customers’ needs and wants occurs within the boundaries of the brand’s core identity, influenced by the organization’s mission, vision, and values.

For example, Kapferer (2012) saw identity as crucial in understanding a brand’s *raison d’être* and inner values, with positioning providing the necessary focus on brand communication. He approached the concept of brand identity with the ‘brand identity prism’, comprising six facets that reflect the picture of the sender as well as the picture of the recipient, and are approached from an externalization perspective (that is, outside orientation) as well as from an internalization perspective (that is, inside orientation). Outside perspectives are the brand’s physique, the relationship of a brand with its users, and the reflection of the brand from a recipient’s perspective. Inside perspectives are exemplified by the brand’s personality, culture, and self-image (Kapferer, 2012, p. 183). Kapferer’s emphasis on brand identity as a basis and guide for positioning encapsulates what can be referred to as *brand-oriented positioning*.

Aaker’s (1996, p. 176) definition reflects the brand-oriented logic that positioning follows identity: “The part of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target audience and that demonstrates an advantage over competing brands.” In Aaker’s model the structure of a brand’s identity includes a core identity, an extended identity, and a brand essence. He suggested that the core identity can only have up to four characteristics in order to remain constant over time and to have long validity. Brand-related elements such as product, organization, person, and symbol are part of the extended identity. Entering the ultimate core in Aaker’s brand identity model means creating a brand essence, which is “a single thought that captures the soul of the brand” (Aaker, 1996, p. 45). However, this understanding of a brand as *having* an essence could be challenged by the understanding of a brand as *being* an essence, reflecting a more relational and more dynamic nature of brand essence (Barnham, 2009, p. 608). For de Chernatony (1999) brand identity is a rich construct to understand and build brands compared to purely focusing on positioning. Table 1 contrasts market-oriented with brand-oriented positioning regarding point of departure, approach, key concept, prominence, and strategic focus.

### **Table 1**

Market-oriented positioning versus brand-oriented positioning (adopted from Urde & Koch, forthcoming)

	<b>Market-oriented positioning</b>	<b>Brand-oriented positioning</b>
<b>Point of departure</b>	External market demand and industry structure	Internal strength-driven brand potential
<b>Approach</b>	Outside-in	Inside-out
<b>Key concept</b>	Image	Identity
<b>Prominence</b>	Market (customer) over resources (brand)	Resources (brand) over market (customer)
<b>Strategic focus</b>	Positioning the brand to satisfy the needs and wants of the customer and non-customer stakeholders	Positioning the brand to satisfy the needs and wants of the customer and non-customer stakeholders – <i>within</i> the boundaries of its identity

To conclude the discussion on market orientation and brand orientation, it should be emphasized that these approaches are different, but synergistic: “there is in fact no inevitable tug-of-war” between the two paradigms (Urde et al., 2011, p. 17). An organization’s approach can be brand-oriented or market-oriented, but more realistically, it will be a combination of the two paradigms. This is also the case for market- and brand-oriented positioning (Urde & Koch, forthcoming).

### ***Schools of Positioning***

Based on the principal conceptualizations of position and positioning in marketing, branding, and strategy, five schools of thought can be further distinguished within the meta-theoretical framework of market- and brand-oriented positioning (Urde & Koch, forthcoming). Each school can be further characterized by a metaphor (a figure of speech in which a descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from, but analogous to, that to which it is literally applicable). Metaphors are powerful because they “extend our knowledge about the unknown by using the already known” (Stålhammar, 1997, p. 10). Analogously, notion of games (known) can be linked to the categorization of different schools of positioning (unknown). In research, metaphors play an important role in refining knowledge by stimulating creativity and vitality (Davies & Chun, 2003; Hunt & Menon, 1995; MacInnis, 2011; Morgan, 2006; Stern, 2006; Tsoukas, 1991). Urde and Koch (forthcoming) provided case examples to illustrate each positioning metaphor with an application in practice.

### *Positioning as a Puzzle*

By analyzing a market, its segments, and the target customers' unmet needs and wants, a brand can be positioned to fit a particular demand. In essence, this challenge is like solving a *puzzle*; fitting the pieces together in such a way so as to see the full picture or pattern. Puzzle-solving methods disclose vital market patterns for analyzing and optimizing product positioning (Smith & Lusch, 1976; Johar & Sirgy, 1989; Wind, 1990; Chintagunta, 1994; Pham & Muthukrishnan, 2002; Gwin & Gwin, 2003). Such methods identify not only the perceived position of a particular brand and its competitors in markets' perceptual space, but also stakeholders' views of ideal brand characteristics (Aaker & Shansby, 1982; Aaker, 2008a; Esch, 2010). For example, conjoint analysis or multidimensional scaling are effective techniques to identify perceptions of how competitive offers differ on predetermined attributes and value propositions (Arora, 2006; Burke, 2011; Gosh & Chakraborty, 2004; Green, Krieger, & Wind, 2001). Statistical analysis can construct perceptual maps generated from customers' and non-customer stakeholders' perceptions (Carrol & Green, 1997; Green & Krieger, 1992; Keller, 2012), which can reveal alternative dimensions and unoccupied gaps in perceptual space (Gensch & Javalgi, 1988).

A Swedish cell phone service (the firm Doro), seeking to reposition its brand due to fierce competition, is one case of positioning strategy as a puzzle. Extensive market and consumer research was applied to constructing positioning charts and perceptual maps, which demonstrated that senior citizens were an underserved market segment. Doro developed a new product design for that market niche, with fewer functions and features, larger displays, and buttons instead of touch screens. The positioning objective was to identify and exploit unmet customer needs and wants (Urde & Koch, forthcoming).

### *Positioning as Wordplay*

In the current context, *wordplay* defines rhetorical techniques used to position a brand and simultaneously de-position competing brands. As Ries and Trout explained, "Positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect. That is, you position the product in the mind of the prospect" (1986, p. 2). They argued that achieving this was a strategic priority in an over-communicated society, and called for an oversimplified message to "cut through the advertising noise" (Ries & Trout, 2001, p. 178). Influenced by Ries and Trout, advertising in the 1970s and 1980s was generally conceptualized as positioning (Pollay, 1985). In academic research, an important aspect of a brand's position is the degree of similarity or difference in a given product or service category (Keller, 2012). A key point is defining and communicating product attributes that are not price-related (Kalra & Goodstein, 1998). To achieve certain customer associations, brand characteristics vis-à-vis competition and category levels can be emphasized to position the brand (Pechmann & Ratneshwar, 1991; Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 1999; Punj & Moon, 2002), with the intention of developing brand mantras (Keller, 1999a).

Coca-Cola and Pepsi are cases of positioning via wordplay. According to Kapferer (2012), Coca-Cola's strategy is to reinforce its top-of-mind status, a key competitive advantage in the low-involvement, impulse-buying, soft-drink product category. Pepsi challenges the entrenched leader, primarily in terms of taste and image. Both companies follow a similar brand and business model that stresses the relevance and positioning of the brand. Thus, Coke lays claim to being 'the real thing' and Pepsi seeks to position itself as 'the choice of the young generation'. Although specific brand slogans change, the rhetoric remains stable in both strategies. The positioning objective is to be top-of-mind and to de-position a key rival (Urde & Koch, forthcoming).

### *Positioning as Chess*

Porter (1996, p. 62) defined strategic positioning as "performing different activities from rivals" or "performing similar activities in different ways", which recalls the tactics of *chess*: diligent analysis, thorough planning, and strategic execution. Thus, trading off between strategies and creating a fit among activities are core tasks for general management in defining a company's position. Evaluating the competitive situation and forces in the industry (Porter, 1980; 1985) and combining available resources with which to compete (Attia & Hooley, 2007; Hooley & Saunders 1993; Hooley et al., 1998; 2008) are central to the notion of strategic positioning. Porter strongly emphasizes competitive positioning as a leading outside-in strategy, treating the development of firm resources as a derivative activity (de Wit & Meyer, 2010, p. 261). In contrast, the core competence perspective pioneered by Prahalad and Hamel (1990) advocates an inside-out approach that "begins by assessing which distinctive competences we [the organization] want to build, and then considers the market opportunities that would exploit them best" (Leavy, 2003, p. 31). In the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991), the two fundamental assumptions are *resource heterogeneity* (that is, firms have different resources) and *resource immobility* (that is, resources cannot be easily transferred to, or copied by, other firms). Brands as resources can be a sustainable competitive advantage if they are characterized by "value, rarity, durability, inappropriability, imperfect imitability, and imperfect substitutability" (Balmer & Gray, 2003, p. 991).

The recent positioning of Electrolux, Europe's largest manufacturer of white goods, can be interpreted as a game of chess. After reviewing its strategic position and brand portfolio, the company focused on the Electrolux corporate brand and a range of fewer, but stronger, individual brands (such as ZANUSSI and AEG) with consistent international positions. The positioning involved an evolution from a manufacturing and product focus to a brand- and market-oriented approach. Brand resources, brand identity, customer insight and segmentation studies were key elements. The objective was to achieve a fit between the business and brand strategies for long-term market relevance and differentiation of its brands (Urde & Koch, forthcoming).

### *Positioning as Dominoes*

The game of *dominoes* involves matching values in order to build a 'line' of linked values. It is played with dominoes (oblong tiles marked with zero to six spots on each half) that are laid down in a line. Each player must lay down a domino with a value that matches the value on the adjacent domino. Analogous to this idea, matching values is the essential logic of the 'domino school of positioning'. A brand's identity and track record (the values and promises that are internally rooted and externally perceived and appreciated by customers and non-customer stakeholders) represents its competitive strength and position in the market (de Chernatony, 2010; Kapferer, 2012; Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2012; Urde, 2003; 2009). Identity is in focus when leveraging brand equity and value creation (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991; Raggio & Leone, 2007). Examples of brands that match their brand values with their positions are Volvo (*safety*), Nordstrom (*service*), Rolex (*prestige*), Miele (*quality*), and Google (*innovation*). Core values (Collins & Porras, 1998; Lencioni, 2002; Urde, 2003), brand heritage (Urde, Balmer, & Greyser, 2007), and authenticity (Beverland, 2005) are examples of essential characteristics that are matched with the selection of an identity-based position. The most successfully positioned companies in terms of growth, financial performance, visibility, and market share are those that have linked a powerful intended brand position to an overarching vision (Chun & Davies, 2001).

As a case in point, the Volvo Cars brand has positioned itself in association with 'safety' since 1976. The organization's internal values, the brand's core values ('quality', 'care for the environment', and 'safety') and promise ("For Life"), along with the externally communicated customer values, are matched in a manner similar to a game of dominoes. Volvo's safety position is derived from its mission, which dates back to when the corporation was founded. For example, the introduction of the seat belt as a standard feature was *not* a customer-driven move, but something that Volvo implemented based on its own convictions (Urde & Koch, forthcoming).

### *Positioning as Wild-Card Poker*

*Wild cards* are sometimes introduced to a deck of cards to 'liven up' a game. These wild cards count as any card, thus increasing the probability of a high-scoring hand. This metaphor stands for creating uncontested market space and making the competition irrelevant; it is the objective of the blue-ocean strategy for which Kim and Mauborgne (2005) advocated. It pictures a total market as consisting of red and blue oceans. In the red ocean, industry boundaries are defined and accepted, and the competitive rules of the game are known. In the blue ocean, untapped spaces and positions await exploitation. The aim is to avoid head-to-head competition by navigating into uncharted, uncontested waters, rather than into those 'reddened by competitors' blood'. Breaking established rules can create differentiated positions. Similarly, Hamel (1996) argued that companies must be unpredictable, so as to wrong-foot the competition, and not simply play by the rules of the game. Dru (1996) advocated 'disruption' as a strategy for overturning conventions in the

marketplace, while Holt and Cameron (2010) suggested ‘cultural innovation’ as the catalyst to unlock markets.

The Swedish vitamin-enriched mineral water brand Vitamin Well illustrates playing a wild card in developing a positioning strategy. Introduced to the Scandinavian market, it disrupted existing product categorization by creating a new category that occupied a space between bottled water and carbonated soft drinks. Vitamin Well became the market leader by default, rather than being an insignificant brand in a broad category. The positioning objectives in this case were to find new, untapped spaces in the market and to bypass competition (Urde & Koch, forthcoming). Today, Vitamin Well competes with Coca-Cola’s Vitamin Water brand. Holt and Cameron (2010) described Vitamin Water’s positioning strategy as “breaking out of the functional benefit trap”, appealing, instead, to media-generated myths such as ‘a vitamin a day’ and ‘bottled-water hydration’.

Figure 4 presents the five distinct schools of positioning, the objectives with which they are associated, and the typical techniques and concepts employed in their application. Each positioning metaphor is located on a continuum of market-oriented versus brand-oriented positioning.

		Brand-oriented positioning (Inside-out)			
		Market-oriented positioning (Outside-in)			
Positioning metaphor	<b>Puzzle</b> Finding lacking pieces in the market puzzle and matching them with existing ones.	<b>Wordplay</b> Exploiting the meaning of words to reach desired brand associations.	<b>Wild-Card Poker</b> Identifying and creating uncontested market space by innovation.	<b>Chess</b> Strategizing to create fit with market demand, resources, and capabilities.	<b>Dominoes</b> Matching identity with selected market positions.
Objective	<b>Optimization:</b> Identifying and exploiting unmet customer needs and wants.	<b>Communication:</b> Finding mental space to position the message in prospects’ minds.	<b>Innovation:</b> Finding new, untapped, market space to bypass competition.	<b>Coordination:</b> Finding a fit between the business and the brand strategy.	<b>Selection:</b> Selecting and fortifying market positions based upon identity.
Typical techniques and concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Image</li> <li>- Pattern matching</li> <li>- Perceptual mapping</li> <li>- Gap spotting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cognitive psychology</li> <li>- Customer insights</li> <li>- Advertising effectiveness</li> <li>- Rhetoric</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economics</li> <li>- Socio-cultural studies</li> <li>- Innovation</li> <li>- Cultural myth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strategic planning</li> <li>- Industry analysis</li> <li>- Resource management</li> <li>- Capabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identity</li> <li>- Values</li> <li>- Track record</li> <li>- Authenticity</li> </ul>

**Figure 4**

Five schools of positioning (adapted from Urde & Koch, forthcoming)

## *Consequences of Choosing Between Approaches to Positioning*

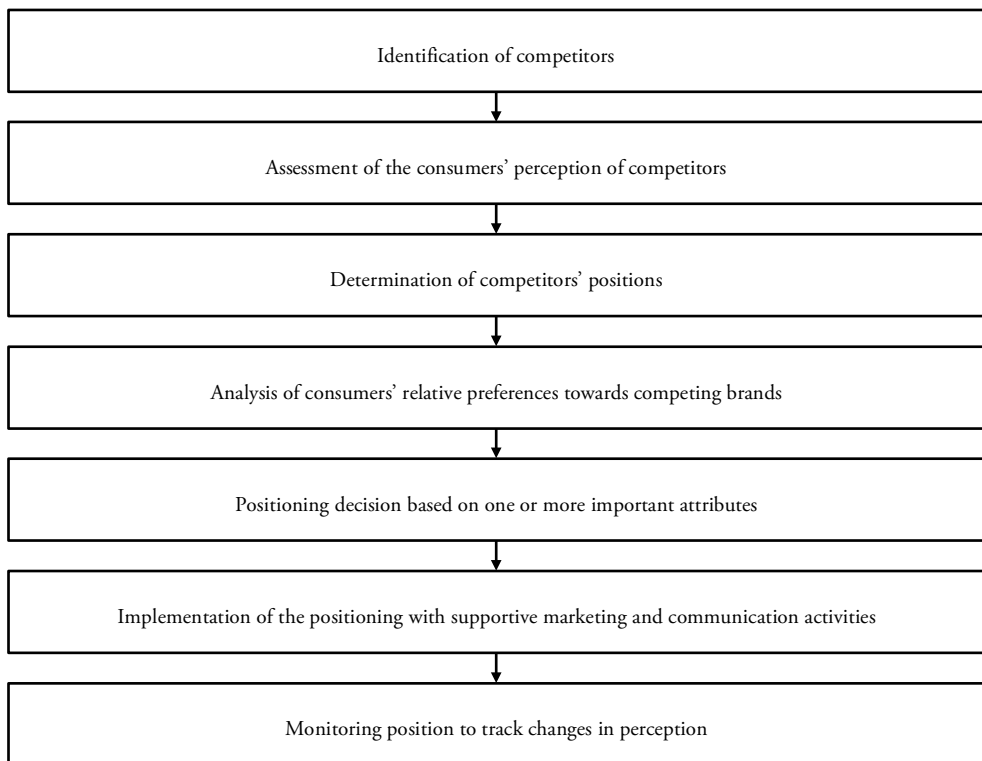
Adhering to either of the two broad approaches or five specific schools has consequences for the brand in question. In choosing between market- and brand-oriented schools of positioning, managers face two fundamental questions: To what extent should an organization be guided by its identity in positioning its brand(s), and to what extent should it be responsive to others' views and wishes (Urde & Koch, forthcoming)? The answer to these quintessential positioning questions divides both academics and practitioners. The question can be traced to the paradox that all organizations must consider market developments while also building and protecting their brand-resources (cf. de Wit and Meyer, 2010). The new terminology of *market-oriented positioning* and *brand-oriented positioning* does not imply that these two approaches are an either/or proposition (cf. Urde et al., 2011); in fact, they are synergistic, and there is a spectrum of hybrid versions in existence (Urde & Koch, forthcoming). However, the way in which an organization selects and executes its positioning strategy will imply a particular approach along the market and brand orientation spectrum (see Figure 4). These strategic choices may be more or less conscious and suggest adherence to one or more of the defined schools of positioning. The case examples clarify how different positioning approaches were utilized. The decision to take a certain perspective on positioning is conditioned by the nature of the brand (product or corporate), its market (consumer or industrial), and phase (introduction or fortification); therefore, it must be regularly reviewed and re-orchestrated. This is particularly relevant when considering the research question of this thesis: How does corporate brand positioning occur over time?

For instance, when Vitamin Well (a consumer product brand) subsequently faced fierce competition from a Coca-Cola brand, it shifted its positioning strategy from wild-card poker (introduction) to chess and wordplay (fortification). Similarly, Volvo Cars' most distinctive safety value, the basis of its brand-oriented domino game, needed to be developed over time. Brand management saw the need to supplement Volvo Cars' positioning strategy with a game of puzzles and wordplay to respond to its customers' evolving needs for more excitement and for improved aesthetics (cf. Urde et al., 2011). Positioning a brand over time requires decisions regarding which elements of brand identity to keep and which ones to change (da Silveira, Lages, & Simões, 2013). To conclude, differentiating between fundamental approaches to schools of positioning is a question of prominence: market (customer) over resources (brand) vs. resources over market.



# Brand Positioning Dynamics

In a normative, product positioning context it is suggested that seven consecutive steps should be followed when developing a positioning strategy (de Pelsmacker, Geuens, & van den Bergh, 2007, p. 133): (1) Identification of competitors, (2) Assessment of the consumers' perception of competitors, (3) Determination of competitors' positions, (4) Analysis of consumers' relative preferences towards competing brands, (5) Positioning decision based on one or more attributes that are important in the mind of the consumer, (6) Implementation of the positioning with supportive marketing and communications activities, and (7) Monitoring the position to track and reveal changes in consumer perceptions and in the competitors' positions. Figure 5 illustrates this normative model of product positioning.



**Figure 5**

Normative product brand positioning steps (adopted from de Pelsmacker et al., 2007)

The existing academic and practitioner literature on positioning offers a number of similar approaches, models, and techniques to select the 'right tools' for the positioning process (cf. Aaker, 1996; de Wit & Meyer, 2010; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 2012; Mühlbacher, Dreher, & Gabriel-Ritter, 1994; Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2012; Rossiter & Percy, 1997; Zednik & Strebinger, 2008). However, such widespread (normative) models say little about the actual dynamics of brand positioning projects. This thesis' goal is to remediate this drawback.

Ultimately, positioning must be managed over time, and an organization needs to carefully design its positioning strategy. This entails selecting and/or combining different schools of positioning. As continual change characterizes industries, markets, and organizations, brand managers are confronted with a paradox of repositioning their brands over time, while concurrently remaining true to their brand values and identity that are supposed to be stable (Keller, 1999b; Yakimova & Beverland, 2005). Brand repositioning can be described as the process of changing the direction of marketing activities and programs to modify stakeholder perceptions of the brand (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). While one task might concern proactively deepening the meaning of the brand, another might be to reactively respond to competitive challenges that threaten an existing position (Keller, 2012; Park et al., 1986). Considering such strategies over time, three general options of brand position elaboration and fortification can be distinguished: brand continuation, repositioning, or an all-new positioning strategy (Sattler & Völckner, 2007). The degree of change that may be needed to close the gap between firm-intended image and consumer-perceived image will vary between small and incremental to large and radical, according to particular needs of the brand (Keller, Sternthal, & Tybout, 2002).

A *continuation strategy* is appropriate to maintain a brand's position, if it fits with the ideal conception of a relevant target group. However, brand marketing activities must continue, and should, if necessary, be adapted to the current *Zeitgeist* (Esch, 2010). Such adaptations of brand positioning strategies are often tempting, especially in cases of management change (Wind, 1990). A reinforcement of the existing positioning strategy becomes necessary when some of the following conditions apply: the target segments consider the emphasized benefits as the most important ones; the brand is perceived as having a distinct advantage over its competitors when it comes to such benefits; environmental conditions like consumer tastes are unlikely to change the desirability of the existing positioning or internal product development plans, and the portfolio of segments does not change the attractiveness of the current positioning (Wind, 1990, p. 404).

A *repositioning strategy* should be considered if the brand's position deviates too much from the ideal conception of the target group. In this case, the old position is partly retained, but complemented with new attributes (Esch, 2010). Reasons for repositioning can be changes in consumption habits and attitudes, similar positioning strategies of stronger competitors, or adjustment of the positioning of the brand to the positioning of the corporation or strategic business unit; this last point being of

notable importance, as it mirrors the aforementioned danger of being just the face of the corporate strategy rather than actually driving it (Esch, 2010). Before undertaking a repositioning strategy, possible pitfalls should be considered and assessed; these include questions of credibility of the repositioning, likelihood of customer persuasion, or value-cost considerations (Wind, 1990, p. 405).

An *all-new positioning strategy* is reasonable in the case of a total mismatch between intended position and perception of the target group. However, most positioning processes consist of the repositioning of existing brands, rather than introducing completely new ones (Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2012). Previous brand positioning investments in image-building can be regarded as sunk costs, and new positioning characteristics and target groups are needed (Esch, 2010); however, the level of uncertainty can be regarded as very high. Moreover, any new positioning decision “should not restrict unduly the product and marketing options the firm may consider in the future” (Wind, 1990, p. 405).

Despite some conceptual and prescriptive studies on brand updating over time, little empirical research considers questions regarding how brands are managed successfully in the long term, and what management activities help brands remain relevant and successful. Yakimova and Beverland (2005) are a rare exception, having examined the organization behind the brand – instead of consumer reactions to brand changes – by asking which organizational drivers (that is, combinations of capabilities such as brand orientation, market orientation, and learning styles) keep brands strong and growing over time without expensive, risky, and revolutionary changes in intended position. Supported by eight brand case studies, mainly B2C, the research identified brand orientation, market orientation, and generative learning orientation as the three brand-supportive capability pillars. Interestingly, firms that were furthest away from being brand-supportive needed to undertake significant changes within the firm itself before being able to develop such capabilities. These modifications included cultural change, gaining top-management support, changing the brand management team, communicating the need for brand value change, and organizing these values and related brand management practices. However, the findings were limited, as in some instances case evidence relied on single respondents and was based on letting respondents recall repositioning activities from the past only. Therefore, in-depth and longitudinal case studies are needed to tap into the actual processes that constitute repositioning.

## *Summary*

Despite the fact that most brand management researchers agree that a systematic firm-level process will lead to the development of brand positioning strategies, most research on positioning and repositioning examines how consumers respond to intended position manifestations or changes in the brand’s position, or how effective

certain positioning strategies are. The brand positioning literature review has shown that many efforts have been made to define and to clarify position input factors, but empirical research on the actual internal process of positioning is rare. Therefore, the identification and understanding of positioning as a strategic development process that can take brand- and/or market-oriented elements is of relevance to outbalance the existing predominant research focus on input factors and outcome effectiveness. If the ultimate rationale in positioning is for brand managers, in particular, to make well-considered choices regarding which aspects of the brand to emphasize (Rieszebos & Van der Grinten, 2012), we need better insights into such managerial activities and choices that occur during positioning development processes.

## Corporate Branding

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, organizations are forced to include ever more differentiated solutions for increasingly fragmented markets (Kornberger, 2010); such differentiated solutions necessarily include the goal of creating distinct brand positions in those fragmented markets. The growing focus on shareholder value and the accompanying evaluations of brands in balance sheets and the stock exchanges make a shared brand management (that is, corporate brand management) significant (Esch, 2010). As an important element of the corporate strategy, the corporate brand requires senior management responsibility (Balmer & Gray, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2001, 2008).

### *Corporate Branding Fundamentals*

While brand building means constructing and defending the brand over time (Kapferer, 2012), corporate brand building efforts need to take organizational culture, values, and structure into account in order to defend and positively influence image and reputation (Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Urde, 2003). In fact, corporate branding can be defined as the initial process of coherent articulation of the corporate brand (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). The corporate brand construct has enjoyed increased attention among other corporate-level constructs since the mid-1990s (Balmer, 2010); seminal articles by King (1991) and Balmer (1995) spearheaded this increasing interest, with King predicting that a holistic *company brand* would be the main discriminator of choice and Balmer emphasizing the strategic significance of *corporate branding*. Considering the historical development of brands, brand management, and the brand manager system (Low & Fullerton, 1994) one could even argue that corporate branding efforts come full circle to its late-19<sup>th</sup>-century roots (that is, the evolution of US national brands), in which the development and management of brands was carried out, to a great extent, by firm owners and top-level managers.

Descriptions and definitions of corporate brands are as various as the discipline's multiple theoretical sources from areas such as marketing, organization studies, human resource management, public relations, corporate communication, and graphic design (see, for example, Balmer, 2001, 2010; Gyrd-Jones, Merrilees, & Miller, 2013). These research areas contribute with concepts such as corporate image, corporate identity, corporate culture, brand identity, brand personality, or reputation (Gyrd-Jones, Merrilees, & Miller, 2013). In principle, however, corporate brands can be described as being the sum of an organization's values (Ind, 2007), an organization defined by its characteristics (Aaker, 2004) or brands applied to corporate level and directed towards multiple stakeholders (Knox & Bickerton, 2003).

Schultz and colleagues made a distinction between first- and second-wave corporate branding: while one group is characterized by a product-driven, tactical, and visual focus, the other emphasized corporate branding as a strategic and integrated field (Schultz, Antorini, & Csaba, 2005). De Chernatony (2010, p. 37) concluded that corporate branding "provides the strategic focus for a clear positioning, facilitates greater cohesion in communication programmes, enables staff to better understand the type of organisation they work for and provides inspiration about desired styles of behavior". This description of corporate branding can be regarded as rather nuanced and integrated. It also shows that the concept of a *brand* is independent from the specific context (corporate, product, or service); in fact, it is the enactment or disciplinary scope of the corporate brand that is distinct (de Chernatony, 2002).

Balmer (2010, p. 181) argued that "corporate brands are marshalled by individuals and groups to define who they are – and who they are not – and in ways that sometimes augment, and sometimes supplant, the 'official' corporate brand positioning and promise promulgated by entities". For the author, corporate brand identities are essentially a perceptual (cognitive) construct existing in people's minds, while corporate identities inhabit organizations. The foundation of successful corporate brand management originates from and is grounded in a company's corporate identity. Corporate brands also acknowledge different needs the various stakeholders of the company might have (Balmer, 2010; Hatch & Schultz, 2008). Moreover, the broad alignment of the branding process is an essential feature of corporate brands to facilitate the general goal of growth generation (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 80). Urde (2003) introduced the concept of core value-based corporate brand building, in which core values are used to summarize the identity of the corporate brand and to guide the brand building process. Balmer and Greyser (2003) reported that there is more than just *the* identity to uncover in corporations; in fact, there are several types of identity to be found: actual identity, communicated identity, conceived identity, ideal identity, and desired identity. These diverse identities require a thorough management, as misalignments can most likely occur.

Hatch and Schultz (2008, p. 9) offered five criteria where product and corporate brands generally differ: scope and scale of the branding effort, origins of brand identity, target audience, responsibility, and planning horizon. Other differentiating

criteria add to this list (see Table 2). The disciplinary roots for product branding are for example marketing, while for corporate brands they are multidisciplinary (Balmer & Gray, 2003). Urde (2013) saw an important difference in language: as for corporate brands, internally and in public discourse the company speaks of ‘we’ while customers and other stakeholders refer to ‘they’; a product brand, however, is called ‘it’ by everyone. While the *scope and scale* of a product brand is one specific product or service or a group of closely related products, for the corporate brand it is the entire enterprise, including the corporation and all its stakeholders. The *origins of brand identity* of a product brand can be described as the advertisers’ imagination informed by market research. For the corporate brand, however, the origins are the company’s heritage, the values and beliefs that members of the corporation hold in common. Whereas a product brand’s *target audience* is mainly customers, the corporate brand has an audience of multiple internal and external stakeholders. In terms of brand *responsibility*, a distinction also has to be made as the corporate brand comprises more responsibility, adding the CEO or executive teams, corporate communications, human resources, strategy, and sometimes design or development departments to the product brands’ core responsables (that is, usual brand management staff, advertising and sales departments). Finally, the criterion of *planning horizon* calls for a clear distinction: it is the life of the product brand that dictates its planning horizon and it is the life of the company in the corporate brand case. To sum up, a corporate brand targets all stakeholders inside and outside the organization. Furthermore, corporate branding influences activities across firm levels, and it impacts everything the firm says and does. Most essentially, a corporate brand depends on aligning vision, culture, and images, as imbalances in an organization’s identity discourse will affect its corporate brand (Hatch & Schultz, 2008).

**Table 2**

Differences between product brands and corporate brands (adopted from Balmer & Grey, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2008; Urde, 2013)

	Product brand	Corporate brand
Disciplinary roots	Marketing	Multidisciplinary
Language	Called ‘it’ by everyone	Called ‘we’ internally and ‘they’ from other stakeholders
Scope and scale of the branding effort	One product or service, or a group of closely related products	The entire organization, which includes all stakeholders
Origins of brand identity	Brand managers’ or advertisers’ imagination informed by market research	The company’s heritage, values, and beliefs that members of the organization hold in common
Target audience	Customers	Multiple stakeholders
General responsibility	Marketing personnel	All personnel
Ultimate responsibility	Product brand managers	CEO and executive team
Planning horizon	Life of product	Life of company

In Balmer's 'corporate marketing mix', the notion of the corporate brand is a key concept named 'the covenant', and it refers to what is promised and expected (Balmer, 2009); this is related to the communicated values of the brand. Furthermore, corporate brands present forms of differentiation from their competitors and enhance esteem and loyalty in relation to its multi-stakeholder groups (Balmer & Gray, 2003), some of whom are actors on financial markets. This underlines the importance of corporate brands in terms of their financial value. The brand, specifically, as the most important intangible asset, can become the central value driver, particularly given the growing debunking of the myth of rational financial markets (Esch, 2010). In sum, corporate branding processes should be seen as being holistic, strategic, relational, and dynamic (Schultz & de Chernatony, 2002).

### ***Corporate Brands and Brand Architecture***

Introducing the corporate brand concept also requires a discussion of brand architecture. This is important as the role and function of the corporate brand differ in the context of distinctive brand architectures (Aaker, 2004; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 2012; Muzellec & Lambkin, 2009; Urde, 2003). The branding literature offers many different forms of brand architecture types, which more or less sympathize with the two extremes of the architecture spectrum: 'house of brands' or 'branded house'. The 'house of brands' architecture type clearly separates the corporate brand from the product brands to avoid corporate brand associations that might adversely affect the image of the product brand (Kapferer, 2012; Muzellec & Lambkin, 2009). FMCG corporations like Procter & Gamble or Unilever are prime examples of this strategy, in which the corporate brand mainly targets institutions (such as governments), media, the general public, suppliers, distributors, and the financial community (including shareholders), but not actual or potential consumers. On the other hand, in the 'branded house' architecture both the corporation and its products share the brand (master brand), targeted towards all stakeholders (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2009). Virgin is a prime example of this type of strategy, as the brand offers diverse products and services such as beverages, entertainment, transportation, and clothing under one and the same brand. Muzellec and Lambkin (2009) introduced a threefold classification for the corporate brand, in which 'the corporate brand as a trade name' is closely related to the 'house of brands' strategy (such as Procter & Gamble), the 'holistic corporate brand' architecture is closely related to the 'branded house' strategy (such as Virgin), and the 'business brand' architecture is to be found somewhere in the middle. From this latter hybrid architecture version, the corporate brand can be conceived of "as a prism through which the corporation is perceived differently depending on the stakeholder perspective" (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2009, p. 49). The business brand architecture further implies that the corporate brand may indeed be a

multidimensional entity (rather than singular and monolithic) that can be configured uniquely for each of several stakeholder groups.

Urde (2003) offered another corporate brand architecture classification based on the brand's core values and identities. He claimed that, in principle, it is possible to speak about four basic brand architectures: corporate brand (mother brand strategy), product brands (daughter brand strategy), corporate and product brands (mother-daughter brand strategy), and products brands and corporate brand (daughter-mother brand strategy). Figure 6 illustrates the corporate brand architecture matrix. The argument for the classification is based on the question of whether the core values are shared or individual (horizontal axis), and whether the identity is shared or individual (vertical axis). In a *mother brand strategy*, the mother brand guarantees the quality and the added value of the whole portfolio; the different corporate brand's products share the core values, but have individual brand identities. In a *mother-daughter brand strategy*, the credibility of the mother brand is the basis of the daughter brand's identity; both core values and identity are shared. In a *daughter-mother brand strategy*, the daughter is endorsed while the mother brand serves as a seal of guarantee; the core values in this architecture are individual, while the identity is shared. In a *daughter brand strategy*, the corporate brand builds on individual portfolio brands only; core values and identity are both individual (Urde, 2003, p. 1029).

		Core values	
		Shared	Individual
Identity	Individual	Corporate brand Volvo	Product brands AEG, Husqvarna, Flymo The Electrolux Group
	Shared	Corporate and product brand SAS Eurobonus	Product and corporate brand Nicorette Pharmacia Corporation

**Figure 6**

Fundamental brand architectures with different roles for the corporate brand (adopted from Urde, 2003)



Building strong brands does not come without challenges, regardless of the various types of brand architectures and strategies available. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) argued that the brand architecture challenge is to identify brands, sub-brands, and their relationships and roles. Moreover, clarifying what is offered to the customer is indispensable to create synergies and to understand the role of brands, sub-brands, and endorsed brands. According to the authors, this challenge is related to further obstacles, one of which concerns creating the structure and processes, as well as the common vocabulary and tools, that lead to strong brands (organizational challenge). Another challenge is to assign brand identity to each managed brand and to position each brand effectively (identity and position challenge).

Arguably, both challenges are most complex in the context of multi-business firms. Determining custody and control for brand positioning strategies, finding a common denominator across various divisions, and coordinating numerous business units and product areas are indeed major challenges (Beverland et al., 2007; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). Research is sparse within this architectural context in which a corporation is structured around modular business units focusing on particular products, customers, or geographies, as elaborated upon earlier. We know too little about how corporate brand positioning strategies are developed and implemented across organizational levels (such as corporate and business), as well as about how brand strategy processes interact between such levels. This evaluation indicates the importance of studying such delegating, finding, and coordinating activities at both corporate and business levels (representing different contexts for investigation) of the case companies in this thesis. This assessment leads to the next section: reviewing and understanding research on corporate branding dynamics.

## Corporate Branding Dynamics

Drawing parallels to organizational change processes, Schultz and Hatch (2003, 2005) understood the corporate brand building process as a sequence of several stages or cycles. Based on a case study of LEGO, the generalized corporate branding cycles included *stating who you are and who you want to be*, *organizing behind your identity*, *involving all relevant stakeholders*, *integrating all expressions of your brand*, and *monitoring results through performance measurements* (Schultz & Hatch, 2003). These cycles of corporate branding indicate the ‘temporal bracketing’ of process data (Langley, 1999). A contribution of this work can be seen in incorporating managerial challenges and organizational dynamics into researching the process of corporate brand formation. Schultz and Hatch (2003) found that several conflicts of brand management and risks associated with not reaching a balance characterize the process. According to the authors paradoxes exist between *inside-out* and *outside-in*

perspectives, *timeless cultural heritage* and *current relevance accentuations*, *global coherence* and *local adaption*, as well as between *centralization* and *decentralization*. Table 3 illustrates the four paradoxes and challenges of corporate brand management.

**Table 3**

Brand management conflicts and associated risks (Schultz & Hatch, 2003)

Inside-out: Emphasizing promises to be made to stakeholders Risk: 'Arrogant Bastard'	Outside-in: Emphasizing what external stakeholders want to hear Risk: 'Headless Chicken'
Timeless cultural heritage and brand identity Risk: Brand Blindness	Current relevance and emotional appeal Risk: Brand Hype
Global coherence and recognition Risk: Brand Isolation	Local adaption and multiple expressions Risk: Brand Fragmentation
Centralization Risk: Brand Police	Decentralization Risk: Brand Turfs

However, the authors' established Vision-Culture-Image (VCI) model, utilized as a case study research framework, might be perceived as explaining too much and obstructing other approaches. The authors' direct (that is, participant observation, temporary member of the brand task force, and permanent member of the Internal Brand Council) and indirect (that is, outside observer) involvement in influencing and changing the LEGO organization also needs to be considered.

Another case study that takes the dynamics of corporate brand building into account is Wallström, Karlsson, and Salehi-Sangari's (2008) investigation of the internal corporate brand building process in Swedish service firms. Arguing that most of the corporate brand building research in existence has been conceptual, the authors aim to empirically investigate brand building from the firm's perspective. The research focus is on the activities that occur before the actual implementation of the brand, including decisions regarding how the intended brand identity is supposed to be perceived before communicating the brand internally and externally. Attempting to also highlight the ways in which different conditions can influence corporate brand building decisions along the way, the authors identified three key steps in the internal corporate brand building process, in all three case companies: brand audit, brand identity, and brand position statement. However, each service company had initiated the brand building process for different reasons, namely reputation crisis, geographical expansion, and simply a need for strategic repositioning. The latter reason is particularly odd, as a need to strategically reposition the brand might be precisely the consequence of the reputation crisis or geographical expansion driver of the previous cases, and would de facto not be counted as the initial brand building process. Contribution-wise, the above-mentioned study substantiates that building a corporate brand involves a company-wide approach, strong leadership, and consistency. Considering the context of a brand reputation crisis, the authors suggested the development of a temporary brand position statement to overcome the

crisis situation and to communicate the new brand values internally. With regards to the geographical expansion context, decisions need to be made concerning brand architecture, and whether daughter brands should be kept or consolidated into one corporate brand. However, the research does not uncover much of the actual dynamics and complexities inherent in corporate brand building. The authors stay with a static representation of 'process' that does little to account for the changeable nature and impermanence of the research object.

An additional set of studies has recently begun to place attention on the daily activities, organizational practices, and situational contexts through which corporate brand strategies are formed and managed (Järventie-Thesleff et al., 2011; Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2011). Such studies draw on the practice turn in contemporary social research, and more specifically apply strategy-as-practice theoretical lenses (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Whittington, 1996, 2007). Vallaster and Lindgreen (2011) utilized a single case study of an industrial corporation's business area (not corporate level) to investigate brand actors and the situational context for corporate brand strategy formation. The research aim responded to the need of better understanding the dynamics of brand building processes, the brand actors besides 'leaders' involved in such processes, the mechanisms through which brand interactions take place (such as meetings), and how internal and external stakeholders come to agree on the brand strategy's manifestation. Interestingly, this paper also draws attention to the potential problem of different divisions or business units of an organization following different goals, which in turn may determine the priority with which an overall corporate brand strategy is followed. The paper contributes by showing how internal and external brand actors interact socially and produce brand strategy manifestations, which are continuously co-created and implemented during ongoing social interactions.

Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander, and Laine (2011) also utilized a single case study of an industrial corporation, but collected data over a period of five years in order to better understand intra-organizational dynamics and complexities of corporate branding. The authors contribute by illustrating three patterns of corporate brand building practices that seem perfectly adequate but that produce tensions in aligning the brand, as the authors revealed. While the 'practice of masterminding' enables the "rigorous formulation and explicit articulation of the strategic vision that is to guide brand-building activities", it "may orient the entire organization to ignore the necessary emerging nature of the corporate brand as well as the strategically valuable knowledge that the rank-and-file members of the organization may have about the activities that are needed to deliver the brand promise" (Järventie-Thesleff et al., 2011, p. 203). The 'practice of notifying' seems to be encouraging for "support activities that produce coherent communication, and thus an effective rollout of the content of corporate brand strategies", but may lead to ceremonial brand strategy implementation and "the treatment of lower-rank members of the organization as passive targets of cascading information" (Järventie-Thesleff et al., 2011, p. 203).

Finally, while the ‘practice of calibrating’ is important for “defining a fixed set of measurable outcomes for monitoring purposes”, it may also “slow down the process by excessively relying on survey results instead of encouraging employees to learn through trial and error” (Järventie-Thesleff et al., 2011, p. 203).

## ***Summary***

There is consensus that an ongoing, systematic brand building process is important for creating a strong corporate brand (de Chernatony, 2002; Hatch & Schultz, 2008; Urde, 2003). Many attempts have been made to define corporate brands and corporate branding, and to clarify where the responsibility for corporate branding resides. Thus, corporate branding as a research field shows signs of maturing as well as increased complexity due to the field’s multidisciplinary roots, its broad scope, and its need to address multiple stakeholders (Gyrd-Jones, Merrilees, & Miller, 2013). However, research focusing on the dynamic aspects of corporate branding is rare and highly needed. Empirical insights are indispensable to better understand how corporate brands are developed, managed, and maintained (Balmer, 2010). Exceptions of more dynamic, process-oriented empirical research in corporate brand management are studies on the cycles of corporate branding of a consumer brand (Schultz & Hatch, 2003); the internal brand building process of corporate service brands (Wallström et al., 2008); the social interactive processes of brand strategy formation in a B2B organization (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2011), and organizational dynamics and complexities of corporate brand building from a practice perspective (Järventie-Thesleff et al., 2011). Yet, these studies did not focus on the role of positioning and how processes (the ways in which things evolve and why they evolve in such ways) of positioning and repositioning a corporate brand occur over time.

## **Corporate Brand Positioning**

Little research has been conducted in regards to the specific connection between corporate brands and positioning. Corporate branding and positioning are sometimes referred to as one and the same in establishing a desired corporate brand identity (Balmer, 1995; Van Riel & Balmer, 1997), or corporate positioning is exclusively referred to as the activity of public relations departments (Wind, 1990); this is similar to the observation that the entire field of brand management could be understood as an exercise in positioning (Marsden, 2002). Others have argued that the positioning of a corporate brand contains a few but especially relevant and differentiating elements a corporate brand should stand for (Esch, Tomczak, Kernstock, & Langner, 2006). This observation reveals again the fixation on position (input and outcome) as opposed to positioning (process). Hatch and Schultz (2008, p. 22) saw positioning

in a corporate branding context as the strategic function to discover or create points of differentiation in relation to competitors as well as aspects of communal belonging; this assessment relates to internal processes of reaching stakeholders outside and inside the organization. The idea of corporate branding implies that the whole organization serves as the foundation for brand positioning applying an inside-out driven approach. This involves the organization being able to make specific choices, design organizational processes, and perform activities distinctively compared to competitors and overall mainstream trends (Hatch & Schultz, 2008).

There are some conceptual models that attempt to place position and positioning into context. For example, Knox and Bickerton (2003) worked towards a sharper idea of *corporate brand positioning* as part of their 'six conventions of corporate branding'. In their analysis, positioning becomes the construction of the brand on corporate level. The authors developed a four-stage positioning process comprising organizational attributes, performance, portfolio, and network benefits. As a common starting point of corporate brand positioning, the authors chose to focus on customer values in order to grasp the understanding of the organization's current brand strengths and desired future position. The authors saw this as an alternative to beginning with corporate values, which might be too subjective and intangible in the attempt to achieve consensus in the management process. The outcome of this method was termed 'the unique organization value proposition' (Knox & Bickerton, 2003, p. 1008). This approach to the corporate brand resembles the aforementioned market-oriented approach. For Balmer (2010), the central marketing notion of positioning resembles a navigational tool in the context of corporate brand identity. Urde (2013) discussed *corporate brand position* as an essential part of his corporate brand identity matrix (CBIM). The intended position, following from the definition of the corporate brand identity, is included as a point of reference for the positioning process to come. Moreover, there is a clear link depicted between formulating the internally perceived 'mission and vision' statement, the central brand core (promise and values), and the externally perceived 'position'. Urde concluded that this linkage, "implies a need to align the organisation's reason for being and its direction with the intended position" (p. 753). This approach to the corporate brand resembles the aforementioned brand-oriented approach.

However, empirical research on the process of how corporate brands navigate and change course (that is, positioning and repositioning) is rare. In other words, insights into the actual corporate brand position formation process, regarding sequences of events that describe the way in which things are done and their change over time, are missing in the field. In essence, in the context of complex multi-business firms, where numerous products and services need to be coordinated under the corporate brand, it is particularly difficult to manage the brand across divisions and to establish a clear position as highlighted earlier. In this context (and the context of the empirical study to be presented later), the main question concerns how the position of a corporate brand and the position of its products are connected; Kapferer's (2012, p. 175)

theoretical answer is that the product's positioning strategy promotes a consumer attribute, benefit, or attitude, while the parent or corporate brand specifies the 'terminal value' upon which these attributes, benefits, and attitudes rest. Similarly, Knox (2004) argued that such core organizational values need to be aligned with the value expectations of key customer segments.

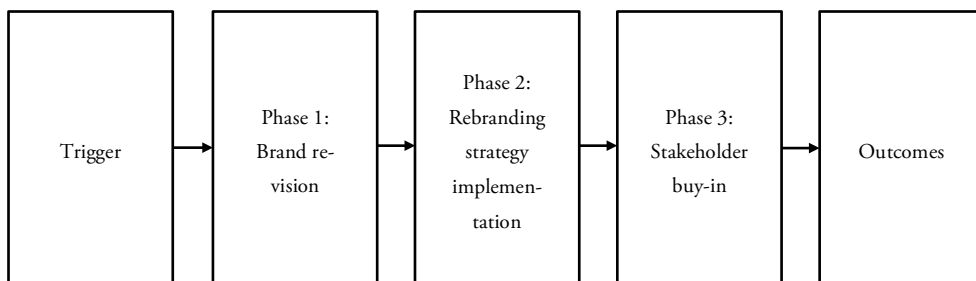
This assessment mirrors two paradoxes that corporate brands face in the process of creating differentiation when positioning their brand (Gyrd-Jones, Merrilees, & Miller, 2013, p. 8). First, for any corporate brand aiming to build differentiation, a major paradox might arise because differentiation (mostly external) may only be achieved at the expense of integration (mostly internal), the reason being that diverse stakeholders and various organizational subcultures make consensus difficult. Thus, the likelihood of successfully integrating an imposed identity and differentiation is reduced. Functional or divisional silos (or internal subcultures within an organization) can contribute to the failure of implementing a new brand strategy in spite of a strong brand vision and management commitment (Aaker, 2008b; Gyrd-Jones, Helm, & Munk, 2013).

### ***Corporate Rebranding***

As an emerging area of research (Ahonen, 2008; Miller et al., 2014), corporate rebranding is potentially useful for learning about the repositioning activities of corporate brands, as well as about why and how things change over time. Corporate rebranding can be contrasted to corporate branding in two ways. First, corporate branding refers to the "initial coherent articulation of the corporate brand", while corporate rebranding can "occur at any time". Second, corporate rebranding focuses on the "disjunction or change between an initially formulated corporate brand and a new formulation" (Merrilees & Miller, 2008, p. 538). Considering these definitions of corporate rebranding, similarities with positioning and repositioning a corporate brand as well as designations such as 'makeover', 'renewal', 'refreshment', 'reinvention', or 'rejuvenation', become apparent (Miller et al., 2014). However, the role of positioning remains unclear, as repositioning can be seen as one of many *facets* of rebranding (Merrilees & Miller, 2008; Miller et al., 2014), or as a key *element* of the rebranding exercise (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). However, 'change in positioning' is just one fundamental part of rebranding, along with 'change in marketing aesthetics', both varying in the degree to which each change occurs (that is, minor to major changes). Following this understanding, "rebranding can be characterized as evolutionary or revolutionary" (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006, p. 805). Sources for triggering rebranding projects can be found across four broad categories of changes (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006, p. 819): in ownership structure (for example, M&A activities), in corporate strategy (for example, divestments), in competitive conditions (for example, outdated image), or in the external environment (for

example, legal obligations). Moreover, two broad approaches can be observed among corporations going through a repositioning process. One approach has the goal of brand integration in order “to unite the corporation and its constituent businesses and products under a single name or master brand”, while the other approach has the goal of brand separation “driven by the desire to distance the corporate brand from its constituent businesses and products” (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2009, p. 43).

Merrilees and Miller (2008) developed a holistic corporate rebranding model that aims to integrate all aspects of the rebranding process and is capable of examining relevant literature. This model is supposed to serve as a theoretical corporate rebranding platform, and reflects a process that covers rebranding triggers, three broad phases in the rebranding process (that is, brand re-vision, rebranding strategy implementation, stakeholder buy-in), and rebranding outcomes (Merrilees & Miller, 2008; Miller et al., 2014). Figure 7 illustrates the corporate rebranding model. While this linear model provides a useful start for understanding and investigating corporate rebranding processes, it leaves many relevant questions unanswered: Where and when do rebranding processes occur within an organization? What exactly drives rebranding processes to occur? What are the actual activities and challenges involved in rebranding processes? Who are the rebranding actors, and what are their roles?



**Figure 7**

Corporate rebranding model (Merrilees & Miller, 2008; Miller et al., 2014)

Other studies provide useful insights into understanding potential difficulties in such corporate rebranding processes. For example, exploratory qualitative interviews with executives working in a leading telecommunications firm revealed four key pitfalls in corporate rebranding: disconnecting with the core, stakeholder myopia, emphasis on labels instead of meaning, and the challenge of multiple identities in a ‘one company, one voice’ brand strategy (Gotsi & Andriopoulos, 2007). Another study identified, described, and explained the tensions in managing the process of rebranding brand-oriented charity organizations: aligning image and identity, stakeholder dialogue and access, and balancing market requirements with organizational identity (Lee, 2013).

Moreover, the integrative review of rebranding research by Miller, Merrilees, and Yakimova (2014) revealed both single- and multi-phase enablers and barriers of corporate rebranding processes based on an examination of 76 case studies. A major multi-phase *enabler* that was found was ‘strong rebranding leadership’, while other rebranding success enablers such as ‘developing brand understanding’ (Phase 1), ‘internal branding activities’ (Phase 2), ‘continuity of brand attributes’ (Phase 2), ‘stakeholder coordination’ (Phase 3), and ‘integrated marketing program’ (Phase 3) were found to be phase-specific. As for major *barriers* to corporate rebranding, only ‘inadequate customer consideration’ (Phase 2) was found to be phase-specific. Multi-phase barriers are ‘autocratic rebranding approach’, ‘stakeholder tensions’, ‘narrow brand re-vision’, and ‘inadequate research’ (Miller et al., 2014).

## A Processual Approach to Positioning

Despite the inherent dynamics of positioning a brand, much research on brand positioning and corporate branding has disregarded the dimension of time. This is likely the result of researchers having a tendency to define positioning mostly as a brand management input or outcome, rather than as a process. Such definition of positioning leads researchers to one-sided static models that emphasize explaining variance in the dependent variable, rather than examining how the dynamic process of positioning unfolds over time. Mirroring process research in organization and management studies (Langley, 1999), process research on positioning brands would, thus, be concerned with understanding how the activities and choices of positioning brands evolve over time, and why they evolve the way they do.

Accordingly, distinguishing between ‘position’ and ‘positioning’ is important from a conceptual point of view as highlighted earlier. Reiterating the argument from the introduction, *position* describes the strategic choice of a position for a brand (intended position) and the resulting outcome (actual position); *positioning* is the management process that seeks to establish a new position in markets and minds, or that modifies (fortify or change) an existing one. This distinction, even if seemingly self-explanatory, is far from clear, as the literature review has shown. Similar to *organizing*, which can be both a verb and a noun, *positioning* should be more connected with verbs than with nouns. This is fundamental to process descriptions; however, it should be stressed that “at no point is something either completely verb or completely noun: movement defines entity and entity defines movement” (Bakken & Hernes, 2006, p. 1612).



## *Process Orientation in Management Studies*

When theorizing about brands and investigating them empirically, it is suggested to adopt experiences of other management disciplines besides traditional marketing perspectives. Organizational theories, in particular, provide useful guidance, “as they are concerned with the complexity of organizations and management processes” (Brodie & de Chernatony, 2009, p. 99). Specifically, a middle-range theorizing mindset (that is, studying a phenomenon of social reality with a limited number of assumptions and considerable accuracy and detail in problem specification) focuses on the interface between theory and practice, with the attempt to ensure theoretical and managerial relevance (Weick, 1989). Increased attention towards the dynamics and complexities of corporate brand positioning over time consequently requires a closer examination of process theory and practice. While the process philosophy perspective deals with ontological and epistemological assumptions, processual models refer to practice or pragmatics of said perspective in management and organization theorizing (Styhre, 2002). In principle, studying organizations that unfold from process metaphysics implies a worldview that sees processes, rather than substances, as the basic forms of the universe. Process philosopher Nicholas Rescher exemplified this by noting that process metaphysics is “really less of a theory than a point of view taking the line that one must prioritize processes over things and activities over substances” (Rescher, 1996, p. 35). Van de Ven (1992) distinguished between three different meanings of process and associated research approaches. In the first type of process understanding (a variance approach to process), a process is considered to be the logic by which independent variables are taken to be contributing factors to a certain outcome (dependent variable). This approach implicates that “process as such is not part of the research, but is simply taken to be there to account for the assumed cause and effect relationships” (Sminia, 2009, p. 99). The second type uses process as a category of concepts, represented by some process variables that are inserted into a cause and effect model. In contrast to the first type, the process effects are part of the research; however, they still resemble a variance approach. In principle, “this is a static representation of a process and does little to account for the changeable nature and transience of the research object” (Sminia, 2009, p. 99). The third type of process research sees process as a developmental event sequence and is concerned with understanding how things evolve over time as well as why they evolve in a certain manner (Langley, 1999, 2011; Pettigrew, 1992, 1997; Van de Ven, 1992, 2007). As highlighted throughout this thesis, it is the third type of process understanding that I assessed as most suitable for the research, and therefore chose to be at the core of this study. This processual understanding takes a historical developmental perspective, and focuses on the sequences of incidents, activities, and stages that unfold over the duration of a central subject’s existence. Seeing ‘process’ as fundamental does not deny the existence of states, events, and entities, but insists on unpacking them to

reveal the complex processes (that is, sequences of activities) that are involved in, and contribute to, their constitution (Langley, 2011).

In research practice, weaker or stronger process views can be differentiated. Supporters of a strong view would look at change in terms of ongoing micro-processes that contribute to constituting and reproducing the organization as a stable entity (Langley, 2011); advocates of the strong process view pose questions in the language of becoming rather than being (seeing change as the basic manifestation of social reality) when it comes to the character and significance of strategy process research (Nayak, 2008; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Supporters of a weak process view might look at organizational change in terms of movement from one state to another (Langley, 2011). The latter orientation can be regarded as having a stronger impact on the practice of process scholarship (Pettigrew, 2012), and is the perspective to which I adhere.

### ***Process Research on Change and Strategy Formation***

The potential usefulness of utilizing organizational change management theories for investigating dynamic questions in corporate brand management has been highlighted as a promising road to explore (see also Miller et al., 2014; Schultz, 2005). In the following parts I introduce key contributions to the understanding of strategy formation and change. This provides useful theoretical lenses for investigating corporate brand positioning over time.

#### *Henry Mintzberg and the Process of Making Strategy*

Mintzberg was one of the first strategy researchers to ask ‘how’ questions in regards to investigating how a strategy is actually realized (Sminia, 2009). His ‘tracking strategy’ approach, aiming to describe strategy as a pattern in a stream of action over a long period of time, led to the realization that making strategic decisions (that is, intended strategy) does not automatically mean that such decisions are to be actually realized and implemented (Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Mintzberg’s inductive case studies needed to be as descriptive as possible to be able to come close to what was actually taking place in organizational strategy formation (Sminia, 2009). His objective was “to come up with descriptions of processes that are as real as possible, which eventually would fit and extend the organization structure configurations defined earlier” (Sminia, 2009, p. 103). Essentially, the image of strategy formation became one in which a realized strategy was understood as a convergence of intended and emergent strategies (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). In brand positioning projects, what types of strategy activities and choices can be referred to as intended and emergent?

### *Andrew Pettigrew and the process of Organizational Change*

For Pettigrew, change is a phenomenon that “creates tension over the existing distribution of resources through threatening the position of some whilst opening up opportunities for others. As such, change stimulates power plays and heightened political activity” (Dawson, 2012, p. 124). His renowned long-time study of continuity and change in the British chemical company Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) introduced the ‘contextualist’ approach to the study of strategy formation and strategic change, and aimed to explain why similar change initiatives within various ICI divisions resulted in dissimilar outcomes (Pettigrew, 1985, 1987, 2012; Sminia, 2009). In his ICI study, Pettigrew criticized dominant theories of organizational change, saying they were “ahistorical, acontextual, and aprocessual” (Pettigrew, 1985, p. 15). In response, his approach highlighted a concern for context and action in the analysis of the firm and organizational change, where event sequences are important to clarify any process analysis as well as the underlying mechanisms that shape those events (Pettigrew, 1992, 1997). As such, Pettigrew’s study attempts relied on structuration theories that see “social process resulting from actions that are bound by the social structure but also have the effect of reproducing and changing the social structure” (Sminia, 2009, p. 104). His contribution that any strategic change content “is ultimately a product of a legitimization process shaped by gross changes in the outer context of the firm and by political and cultural considerations inside the firm, though often expressed in rational/analytical terms”, still has a major impact on practical intervening strategies to create change in organizational settings (Pettigrew, 2012, p. 1308). Pettigrew advocated retrospective and real-time longitudinal case studies, such as his unique eight-year empirical study of change in ICI (Pettigrew, 1985). Essentially, Pettigrew emphasized the ‘craft’ aspects of empirical research, where the actual research activities such as deciding what kind of process is going to be investigated or formulating research questions, gathering and analyzing data, involve both induction and deduction (Pettigrew, 1990; Sminia, 2009). In this endeavor, existing theories might be useful in providing an initial language to describe the aspects that characterize the phenomenon to be investigated (Pettigrew, 1990). The approach taken in the present thesis (critical realism) perhaps best compares with Pettigrew’s ‘contextualist’ approach: seeing social circumstances as mediating between reality and accounts of reality (Sminia, 2009, p. 106). In brand positioning projects, what are the historical, contextual, and processual factors that shape positioning dynamics?

### *Andrew Van de Ven and the Process of Innovation*

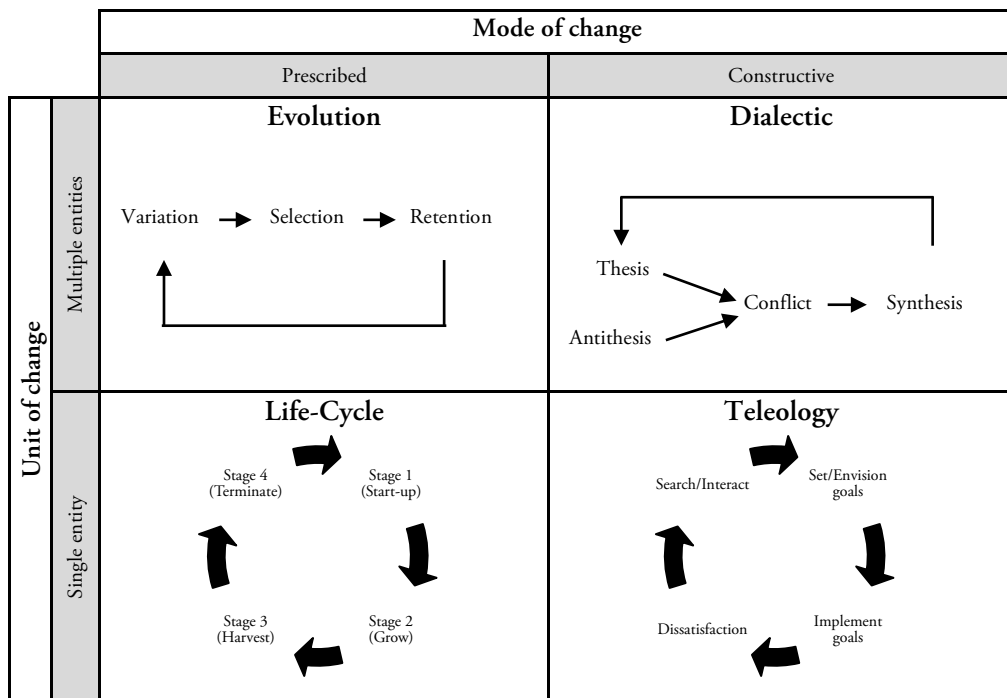
During the *Minnesota Innovation Research Program*, Van de Ven and colleagues utilized a grounded theory approach to research the process of innovation, which at the time had not received much attention, although innovation itself was a well-researched subject (Sminia, 2009). Van de Ven understood innovation as a general management problem, and often used innovation interchangeably with strategic

change (Sminia, 2009, p. 107). To better understand how innovations develop over time and what makes innovation processes become successful, the researchers involved in the program conducted 16 separate longitudinal case studies utilizing both retrospective and real-time data collection. The coding guide centered on the concept of 'event' as the basis for data collection and analysis, whereas raw data was recorded as 'incidents' (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 217). Such incidents described what happened and who had done something, before coding these incidents into events; that is, theoretically laden interpretations of what had chronologically occurred (Sminia, 2009). The codes were used as sensitizing concepts describing an innovation process and included changes to ideas, people, transactions, context, and outcomes (Van den Ven, 2007, p. 216). In brand positioning projects, how can changes to ideas, people, transactions, context, and outcomes be understood?

### *Meta-Theories of Change*

Van de Ven and Poole (1995) then worked on developing a meta-theory that aimed to explain development and change in organizations. They presented four distinct types of process theories: life-cycle-type theory, teleological-type theory, dialectical-type-theory, and evolutionary-type theory (see Figure 8). These process theories represent different sequences of change events that are driven by different conceptual motors and operate at different organizational levels (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, p. 510). This idea derives from a realist ontology in which it is believed that underlying causal mechanisms that cannot be directly observed interact to produce empirically observed phenomena (Van de Ven, 2007). The *life-cycle change motor* assumes that an entity (for example, an organization) goes through distinct stages of development following an internal logic that governs its progression, while maintaining its identity (Sminia, 2009, p. 108). This understanding of change focuses on stages of organizational growth, maturity, and decline. It conceptualizes change as a natural part of human or organizational development (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). On this basis, can brand positioning, over time, be conceived of as going through distinct stages of development that follow an internal logic? The *teleological change motor* assumes that an entity develops a common goal in an identifiable manner, and then goes on to meet the requirements and constraints associated with this end state (Sminia, 2009, p. 108). This understanding of planned change assumes that organizations are purposeful and adaptive, and change because individual leaders, change agents, and others see the necessity for change (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). This mechanism is generally in line with the understanding that the brand manager is *the* agent in charge of making a position decision (see, for example, Riezebos & Van der Grinten, 2012). Do individual leaders or change agents actually drive brand positioning as a precise change process? The *dialectical change motor* believes that some form of contradiction fuels the change process, which results in states of conflict that must be dealt with (Sminia, 2009, p. 108). Such a dialectical understanding refers to political models, where change is characterized as the result of clashing ideologies or belief systems (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). On this ground, can

positioning be conceived as resulting from states of conflict and contradictions (such as different opinions on how to position the brand) inherent in the process? Finally, the *evolutionary change motor* assumes that change occurs due to some form of external pressure accompanied by a mechanism of variation, selection, and retention (Sminia, 2009, p. 108). Main assumptions underlying this understanding are that change occurs in response to external, environmental circumstances, and that organizations as diversified, interdependent, and complex social systems evolve naturally over time because of such external demands (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Is brand positioning perhaps an evolutionary process, where external pressures and demands are predominant?



**Figure 8**

Four motors of change (adopted from Van de Ven & Poole, 1995)

Yet, these motors of change initially classified by Van den Ven and Poole might not be exhaustive in attempting to understand empirical change processes (Langley, 2011; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Alternative processual devices offering elevated meta-theoretical framing on change include *social-cognition* or *cultural models* (Kezar, 2001). They add a perspective on change that is less functionalist than the previous

four motors. Social cognition models describe change as being tied to learning and mental processes such as sensemaking. As a process of organizing, sensemaking comprises the “ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing”, and “involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action” (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409). From this perspective, change occurs because individuals see a need to grow, learn, and change their behavior. Is brand positioning, then, an individual managerial decision-making process that results from sensemaking? In cultural models, change occurs naturally as a response to alterations in the human environment. In essence, cultures are always changing (Morgan, 2006), and the change process tends to be long-term and slow. From a cultural perspective, change within an organization entails alterations of values, beliefs, myths, and rituals (Schein, 2010) and emphasizes irrationality, unconsciousness, and organizational complexity (Kezar, 2001). Understanding corporate brand positioning change over time from these meta-theoretical perspectives is potentially helpful to learn about the deep generative processes and structures (or mechanisms; the way things act) that constitute its existence.

### ***Practice Research on Change and Strategy Formation***

Asking ‘who is involved’ in corporate brand positioning work (as part of the research question) invites for a discussion of strategy-as-practice. Proponents of such strategy-as-practice approach (see, for example, Jarzabkowski, 2004; Whittington, 2007) argue for the usefulness of understanding what strategy teams and other relevant actors actually do on the grounds of social theory. While this perspective shares the overarching goal of strategy process research (that is, studying the strategic events and activities in organizations), strategy-as-practice differs from strategy process research in that it favors managerial agency, situated action, and strategy stability together with strategic change over understanding strategic change from a firm-level perspective (Paroutis & Pettigrew, 2007). The practice approach to strategy identifies three central concepts that are also valuable for the study of positioning in strategic brand management. These concepts are praxis, practices, and practitioners (Whittington, 2007). *Praxis* is the actual work of strategizing (such as meetings, consultations, writing, presenting, and communicating) that constitutes making and creating strategy. It can further be described as ‘the way of doing things’ in the context of strategy work. *Practices* refer to the shared routines of behavior, including traditions, norms, and procedures for thinking, acting, and using ‘things’ in the broadest sense; recognizing strategy practices as significant in their own right has implications for conceptions of performance: practice’s impact on organizational outcomes or its own success in achieving widespread diffusion and adoption in institutional terms. Finally, *practitioners* are the workers of strategizing, including managers, consultants, and specialized internal change agents.

Corporate brand positioning practitioners (actors) engaged in positioning work can be understood from a 'social practice' or 'community of practice' perspective, as their activity is an organized human activity (Schatzki, 2005). In this micro-context, "individual thought is essentially social and is developed in interaction with the practical activities of the community, through living and participating in its experiences over time" (Jarzabkowski, 2004, p. 536). Through the entry and exit of its members, communities (such as communities of practicing brand managers) are exposed to generative practice. Change agents coming from outside into an organization may first learn how to interpret the social infrastructure of their new environment from continuing members, which results in the resocialization of these continuing players and the reinforcement of existing practice. Due to their low socialization in the new community, change agents might also "question the infrastructure, so creating the potential for its reevaluation and adaption" (Jarzabkowski, 2004, p. 537).

## Summary

This chapter's goal was to lay the theoretical foundation for the present thesis by means of a focused literature review and theoretical framework. Positioning perspectives have been highlighted from various relevant angles. This was a first step to shed light on what positioning is and how the concept relates to other concepts. At this stage of the discussion a clearer picture of brand positioning, especially in relation to corporate brand management, brand orientation, and market orientation, should have been developed. The overall aim was to offer sharpened theoretical tools to assist in analyzing the empirical material, in order to ground empirical findings of corporate brand positioning in a theoretical discussion. The literature review revealed that dynamic research on corporate brand positioning is sparse. Attempts to empirically investigate brand dynamics are increasing, although the focus is placed mainly on related concepts such as corporate branding, corporate rebranding, internal corporate brand building, or corporate brand strategy formation. Process and practice research on strategic change has been found useful as it can assist in answering dynamic questions of corporate brand positioning. The next chapter carves out a research model for studying the process of corporate brand positioning empirically, based on the theoretical framework presented in this chapter.

# Chapter 3 | Research Model

Theory should be understood as “glue”, in that it holds together several elements that are important for studying the phenomenon of interest and that allow such theoretical “bits” to articulate with each other (Thomas, 2011, p. 179). Thus, theory’s major purpose is to help one explain and interpret research findings by means of noticing where patterns exist, abstracting ideas from the empirical material and offering explanations, connecting one’s own findings with those of others, and thinking critically about one’s own ideas and those of others. This chapter’s aim is to develop a research model that integrates theoretical perspectives for exploring the ways through which corporate brand positioning occurs over time.

## Research Model Development

Studying positioning processes in industrial multi-business firms requires a research model that guides the empirical and analytical work. Conceptual, normative, and empirical brand positioning and corporate branding literature, along with process theories of change, are the foundations of the model. The framework distinguishes between four overall stages of a corporate brand positioning process within the context of corporate and business level positioning.

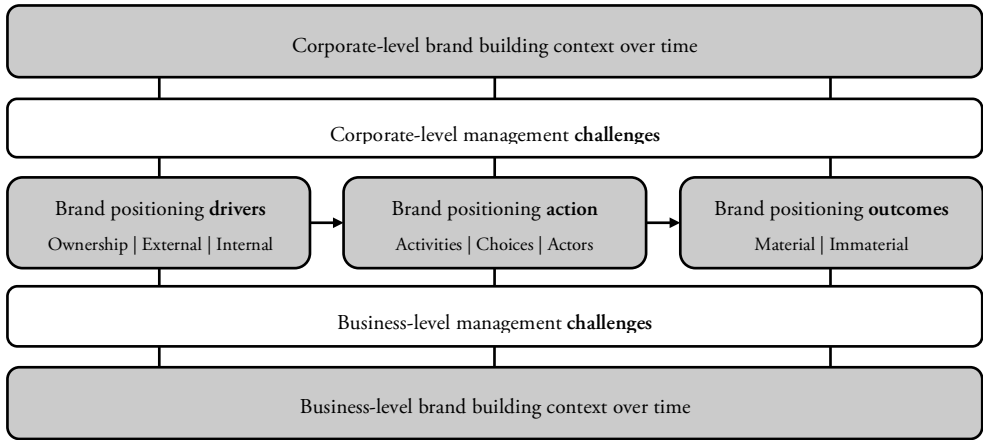
### *Dual Level Model*

All stages (drivers, actions, outcomes, and challenges) are set in the overall context of corporate- and business-level brand building. Corporate brand positioning is assumed to occur within and between these empirical levels of analysis (corporate and business levels). Context then offers a simpler and less well-articulated version of contingency: it refers to ‘relevant circumstances’ that may be important concerning the focal entity and the environment (Easton, 2010). Firm-level information (micro context) on cultural, structural, and political factors, as well as competitive and institutional forces (macro context) may, for example, predispose a certain type of recursive or adaptive brand practice (Jarzabkowski, 2004). The dual level model of positioning builds on the assumption that corporate brand positioning not only takes place at corporate level, but also at business level. For example, the detail and fact that both ABB and



Trelleborg historically come from a conglomerate-like organizational structure is an important contextual aspect for studying brand positioning processes, on both corporate and business levels. This is due to such a structure providing for certain constraints or opportunities in agent's decision-making processes when positioning the brand. Positioning and repositioning case studies will be accomplished on corporate and business levels to learn about the interaction and respective challenges in this endeavor. This corresponds with process research on the strategic evolution such as business exit or internal corporate venturing, which revealed the interaction among top-down and bottom-up strategy-making (Burgelman, 1983, 1996). Burgelman's positive-descriptive processual approach to strategic development helps to "identify and explain paradoxes, vicious circles, dilemmas, and tensions in the strategy making process that derive from the activities of managers that are differentially situated in the organization and respond to different external and internal pressures" (Burgelman, 1996, p. 206). As for positioning strategy outcomes, they may emerge from negotiating multiple and potentially competing interests between different individuals and organizational groups across corporate and business levels (Pettigrew, 1985). In a brand management context, for example, it might be that functional or divisional silos across organizational levels hinder successful brand strategy implementation and brand orientation (Aaker, 2008b; Gyrd-Jones, Helm & Munk, 2013).

The positioning processes are the cases and units of analysis in the present thesis, and are approached from a management perspective (for a detailed methodology discussion, see Chapter 4). This means that the positioning process needs to be seen through the lenses of corporate- and business-level managers (internal actors), taking into consideration their retrospective and real-time sensemaking of their actions. Nevertheless, the conceptually depicted process may also include potential actors contributing to the process from outside the organization (external actors). The process stages should be understood as intertwined and overlapping, rather than following each other in a strict and causal order. Moreover, the different stages are understood as consisting of several sub-processes in terms of events, activities, and choices (Langley, 1999; Van de Ven, 2007). Finally, this model should be understood as inherently dynamic, meaning that the illustrated process is likely to occur at several occasions (that is, during several phases) over time and during the existence of the corporate brand. Figure 9 depicts the research model for studying brand positioning processes on corporate and on business levels.



**Figure 9**

Corporate brand positioning research model (Note: Arrows in the model represent likely sequences among events over time, not causation between events)

### ***Temporal Location***

Regarding process research and the critical realism meta-theoretical paradigm, in both cases it is important to consider the temporal locations where moments of agency occur. Fleetwood (2005, p. 203) pointed out that “whatever happens, however agents and structures interact, it is important to be clear about one point: action is a continuous, cyclical, flow over time: there are no empty spaces where nothing happens, and things do not just begin and end. The starting point for an analysis of any cyclical phenomenon is always arbitrary: we have to break into the cycle at some point and impose an analytical starting point”. Considering this breaking into a continuous flow of branding activities, I started to analytically understand why ABB, Trelleborg, and Holmen invested in positioning and repositioning exercises in the past and present. For that reason, position drivers (on both corporate and business levels) are the first analytical building block in the research model.

### ***Brand Positioning Drivers***

‘Brand position drivers’ refers to the initial conception of a need to change the current position. The literature review revealed that a brand is likely to determine initiatives

and actions taken by the firm. One scenario highlights the option for a firm to assign *brand strategy* the 'less leading' role of the visible implementation of the *corporate strategy*, or the 'more leading' role in the sense that brand strategy is driving corporate strategy (Esch, 2010). Despite this important relationship, which functions as a driver for the corporate brand positioning process, other 'initiating drivers' related to the brand and corporate strategy relationship have been found to be useful. Besides this overall positioning driver, in order to achieve competitive advantages a brand's position should be adapted to the current *Zeitgeist* (Esch, 2010). Adaptations might also be tempting, especially in the case of a change in management (Wind, 1990). Repositioning projects should be considered if the brand's position deviates too much from the ideal conception of the target group, or if stronger competitors' similar positioning strategies have been discovered. In this case, the old position is partly retained, but is complemented with new attributes (Esch, 2010). Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) uncovered that sources for triggering corporate rebranding projects are not exclusive to, but will most likely include, changes in: ownership structure (for example, M&A activities), corporate strategy (for example, divestments), competitive conditions (for example, outdated image), or the external environment (for example, legal obligations). The importance of brand identity as such (Kapferer, 2012; De Chernatony, 2010) and in its various forms (such as core values, mission, and vision) has been found to be a useful brand-oriented source for positioning (Urde & Koch, forthcoming).

### ***Brand Positioning Action***

The second stage includes events, activities, and choices during the planning phase of internally positioning the brand. This stage is of peculiar interest as it aims to provide insights into the 'black-box' of which elements constitute the actual positioning planning process and how the process unfolds. In other words, this stage aims to describe positioning action including changes to 'ideas' (which brand position and story to choose), 'people' (actors' involvement in brand positioning), 'transactions' (sequences of decisions and actions), and 'context' (what the relevant circumstances for brand positioning projects are), as suggested by process researchers (see, for example, Van den Ven, 2007, p. 216). It is, essentially, the process of positioning as organizational change, which covers events, activities, and choices of intended position strategizing and implementation. Uncovering the internal planning process of positioning and repositioning a corporate brand is the main area of investigation in this thesis. Factors for analyzing the brand in a positioning process can be of brand-oriented nature, market-oriented nature, or a hybrid of the two (Urde & Koch, forthcoming; Urde et al., 2011). It has been mentioned that brand identity, in combination with target group relevance and competitor differentiation factors, account for the most important positioning input factors that need to be matched (Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2012). Activities such as brand platform building, and

decisions related to point-of-parity and points-of-difference, are likely to occur in this phase (Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 2012). Moreover, further challenges are likely to occur during this phase of the process, as suggested by organizational change theories (Dawson, 2012; Pettigrew, 2001; Schultz & Hatch, 2003). Investigating the sequence of events, management activities, and choices is essential to increase knowledge about elements influencing the process and how the process unfolds (Langley, 1999).

### ***Brand Positioning Outcomes***

The internally- and externally-oriented positioning processes of the ‘means’ involve managerial actions in the overall framework of brand building on corporate and business levels within the organization. The proposed process analysis framework subsequently leads to the location and explanation of outcomes. The third stage completes the research model by means of a realized brand image and position outcome in terms of brand awareness, image, and reputation. This can be evaluated once ‘routine operations’ of new work practices or procedures with the updated brand position strategy have been established. More specifically, outcome here refers to evaluating moments of success or failure assessing the process. Outcomes can be distinguished between longer-term outcomes such as realized market and mind positions, or shorter-term outcomes such as key success moments during the change process.

### ***Brand Positioning Challenges***

Management challenges in brand positioning projects mostly like occur across the model’s drivers, action, and outcomes stages. Understanding these challenges involved in positioning helps to highlight the barriers and enablers in the process.

## **Summary**

This chapter seeks to develop a research model to explore the corporate brand positioning process from corporate- and business-level brand building perspectives (dual level). The proposed model incorporates relevant theoretical perspectives and consists of four building blocks: (1) Brand positioning drivers, (2) Brand positioning action, (3) Brand positioning outcomes, and (4) Brand positioning challenges. The theoretical framework and research model, grounded in research problematization, aim, and question, are employed in the next chapter to guide the research methodology utilized to investigate corporate brand positioning processes.

# Chapter 4 | Methodology

Despite a common understanding of what positioning is, the literature review has shown that research on the *process* of positioning corporate brands is both rare and insufficient. Moreover, most research has disregarded the dimension of time, and conceived of brand positioning as an outcome, despite its inherent dynamism. Therefore, I argue that more research is needed on firms' internal development processes vis-à-vis external or internal changes. Seriously approaching the dimension of time as a research lens would allow for such in-depth investigations. This chapter describes how I conducted the empirical study. It reflects upon methodological choices made on the basis of the research problem, aim, question, theory, and model. I will argue for the choice of research design and philosophy, data generation, analysis of empirical material, and finally, research quality considerations.

## Case Study Research Design

I chose a qualitative case study design that primarily focuses on the dynamics of evolving processes rather than on the systems of relationships among variables (Langley, 2011). Eisenhardt (1989, p. 534) defined the case study as a research approach that “focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings”. Case study design is a vehicle through which several methods can be combined in order to capture such dynamics (Eisenhardt, 1989; Bryman & Bell, 2007; Thomas, 2011). This study method is concerned with case complexity and particularity, and allows investigations to retain characteristics of real-life events (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Yin, 2009), and it offers the possibility of studying problem-defined situations in great detail (Easton, 2010). The exploratory nature of studying dynamic corporate brand positioning processes makes the approach a reasonable research tool. The processual school of thought is particularly linked to longitudinal qualitative research methodologies such as the in-depth case study, and aims to contribute to “theory development, to methodological considerations in studying change processes as they unfold and happen over time, and to providing practical guidelines on change management” (Dawson, 2012, p. 130).

## ***Research Philosophy: Critical Realism Position***

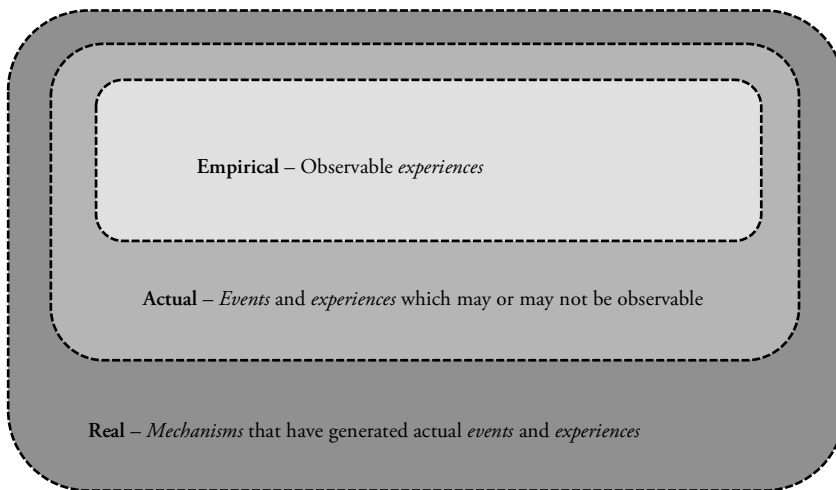
Whenever scholars publish a piece of research, they inevitably make explicit or implicit assumptions about how they view the world (that is, ontology) and how they can come to know the world (that is, epistemology). In writing this thesis, I will inevitably display my views on the world, and how I think it is possible to learn about it. Reflecting on these fundamental questions, it is critical realism that best inspires my craft as a researcher. Through being informed by a critical realist philosophical position, I aim to substantiate the chosen case research method. Since all philosophical positions rely on assumptions, they can only be ultimately judged pragmatically and in terms of the researcher's beliefs that they result in better explanations. Critical realism is a "meta-theoretical paradigm focused on explanations of the underlying 'generative mechanisms or structures' that shape corporate agency and the social relations that it reproduces and transforms" (Reed, 2005, p. 1623). In other words, critical realism's aim is to understand the deep processes of phenomena. Critical realism is particularly well suited as a companion to case research and requires thoughtful, in-depth research with the objective of understanding why things are as they are (Easton, 2010). A critical realist perspective is especially suitable for process-focused case research, as it requires from me, as an organizational analyst, to provide analytically structured historical accounts of specific "transition processes and their outcomes" (Reed, 2005, p. 1638).

### *Ontology*

Critical realism distinguishes between the world existing independently of humans *and* the human experience and knowledge of it. This is often referred to as 'transcendental realist ontology'. In other words, critical realists assume that there is a real world out there, but there is no way that such an assumption can ever be fully proved or disproved (Bhaskar, 1975; Sayer, 1992, 2000). The researcher's attempts to understand this real world are severely limited, imperfectly apprehensible, and can only be approximated (Easton, 2010; Sayer, 2000, Van de Ven, 2007). The difference between critical realists and, for example, social constructionists lies "in the acceptance of the possibility of knowing reality in the former case and its rejection in the latter" (Easton, 2010, p. 122). Moreover, "objects – whether natural or social – necessarily have particular powers or ways of acting and particular susceptibilities" (Sayer, 1992, p. 5). Finally, the world is thought of as "differentiated and stratified, consisting not only of events, but objects (entities), including structures, which have powers and liabilities capable of generating events. These structures may be present even where, as in the social world and much of the natural world, they do not generate regular patterns of events" (Sayer, 1992, p. 5). This stratified (rather than flat) ontology distinguishes between the real, the actual, and the empirical (Bhaskar, 1979). This has major epistemological implications (Easton, 2010) that are discussed in the next section.

## *Epistemology*

Epistemology (theory of knowledge) “exhausts ontology to the extent that it determines the nature of our world and the inherent limits of our ability to understand it by imposing the fundamental categories and concepts through which we come to know it” (Reed, 2005, p. 1623). In critical realism’s stratified ontology (Bashkar, 1979; see Figure 10), the *empirical* domain is where observations are made and experienced by observers (such as the researcher). However, events and experiences occur in the *actual* domain and may not be (entirely) observed, or may be very differently understood by the researcher. This means that there is a process of interpretation intervening between the empirical and actual domains. Finally, events and experiences occur as a result of mechanisms that operate in the *real* domain. This ‘real’ may not always be (directly) observable: “We see just the tip of an iceberg but that doesn’t mean that the invisible three-quarters is not there or is unconnected to what we see” (Easton, 2010, p. 123).



**Figure 10**

### Critical realism’s stratified ontology and epistemological consequences

Critical realists accept that the world is socially constructed, but argue that this is not entirely the case (Easton, 2010). For example, I agree that social phenomena’s production and material effects exist regardless of researchers’ interpretation of them (critical realist ontology), although they have to be initially interpreted through the researcher’s own frames of meaning and reference (Sayer, 1992). In other words, access to the world is always mediated and concept-dependent through social

phenomena such as actions, texts and institutions (Fleetwood, 2005). Favoring the critical realism philosophical system also implies assessing knowledge as *not* being immune to empirical check, even though our knowledge of the world is fallible and theory-laden (Sayer, 1992). I concur with Sayer in that knowledge's effectiveness in informing and explaining successful material practice is *not* merely accidental.

### *Knowledge*

Science, or the production of any kind of knowledge, is a social practice. The conditions and social relations of the production of knowledge influence its content. In critical realism, scientific knowledge comprises provisional and fallible descriptions of structures and powers (Gorsky, 2013). In other words, knowledge can be described as providing the best approximation to the phenomenon being investigated. However, I recognize that knowledge also has a non-exclusive linguistic dimension. The nature of language and the way researchers communicate are not incidental to what is known and communicated; awareness of these relationships is vital in evaluating knowledge (Sayer, 1992). This implies that we, as researchers, must be critical of the entities we study. In doing so, "critical realism acknowledges that social phenomena are intrinsically meaningful, and hence that meaning is not only externally descriptive of them but constitutive of them (though of course there are usually material constituents, too). Meaning has to be understood, it cannot be measured or counted, and hence there is always an interpretative or hermeneutic element in social science" (Sayer, 2000, p.17).

### *Entities*

Entities (or objects) provide the basic theoretical building blocks for critical realist explanations, and can be, for instance, organizations, people, relationships, attitudes, resources, inventions, or ideas (Easton, 2010). Critical realists claim that such entities *can* (which does not mean that they do) exist independently of our knowledge of them (Fleetwood, 2005). Entities can be human, social or material, complex or simple, structured or unstructured; they stand in contrast to the idea of 'variables' that dominates most social research traditions (such as positivism). In this thesis I place the focus on entities rather than on variables, because the latter "can only register (quantifiable) change, not its cause" (Sayer, 1992, p.180). Focusing on entities directs my attention to the fundamental nature and capabilities of the things being researched, rather than simply focusing on their measurable properties (Easton, 2010). As a researcher inspired by critical realism, it is my task to identify the entities that characterize the phenomenon being studied: organizations, people, relationships, attitudes, resources, inventions, or ideas related to corporate brand positioning.



### *Causality, Powers, and Liabilities*

For critical realists, an entity is said to be real if it has causal efficacy, has an effect on behavior, or simply *makes a difference* (Fleetwood, 2005). Again, causality does not concern the variable-like relationship between discrete events ('Cause and Effect'), but the causal powers or liabilities of entities and their relations (Sayer, 1992). In essence, causation derives from the powers of structures whether they are of a natural or social kind (Gorski, 2013). A causal explanation is one that identifies the objects (entities) and their mechanisms (or 'deep structures', 'deep processes', or 'generative mechanisms') and the way they combine to cause events (Easton, 2010). "What causes something to happen has nothing to do with the number of times we have observed it happening. Explanation depends instead on identifying causal mechanisms and how they work, and discovering if they have been activated and under what conditions" (Sayer, 2000, p. 14).

### *Modes of Reality*

Fleetwood (2005, p. 199) pointed out that "confusion often stems from (mis)treating *real* entities synonymously with *material* entities; and/or from (mis)treating non-material entities synonymously with non-real entities." He used the example of God: "God may or may not be real, but the *idea* of God is as real as mount Everest, because the *idea* of God makes a difference to people's actions." Likewise, one could argue that a brand may or not be real, but the idea of a brand potentially makes a difference to people's actions. Just consider the enormous amount of money paid for the intangible 'brand value' during acquisitions, year in and year out. The idea of a brand and its associated values certainly make a difference to agents and their actions. Although many things are real (like brands), they are real in different ways (Fleetwood, 2005). This thesis focuses on the 'socially real': *the socially real* refers, for example, to practices, states of affairs or entities such as caring for children, the market mechanism, or social structures that constitute organizations. Critical realists use the term 'social structures' as a multipurpose term to refer to configurations of causal mechanisms, rules, resources, relations, powers, positions, and practices. For instance, social entities cannot be touched, as they have no materiality or physicality. Moreover, entities such as organizations are social because they are dependent on human activity in order to exist (Fleetwood, 2005, pp. 201). Recognizing that socially real entities are dependent on human activity entails questioning 'which humans are (not) involved?', 'when are humans involved?', or 'what kind of human activity is involved?' Asking such questions is very much in line with the research aim and case study research approach to better understand the social reality of corporate brand positioning processes and practices.

### *Structure and Agency*

From a critical realist perspective, there is no “structure / agency problem”, because human agents are “bio-psycho-social structures with emergent powers of intentionality” (Gorski, 2013, p. 668). However, intentionality does not mean agents must have the correct conception (or complete knowledge) of what they are doing (and why they are doing it): “It is enough that human agents have some idea of what they are doing and why they are doing it: agents are purposive” (Fleetwood, 2005, p. 203). Not only do agents have structure, social structures also have agency, one that “transcends and influences the intentions of the individual agents that co-constitute them” (Gorski, 2013, p. 668). In other words, structures of society operate through the mediation of human agency and activity. Structure of entities refers to the social mode of reality (Easton, 2010; Fleetwood, 2005) and is “a set of internally related objects or practices” (Sayer, 1992, p. 92). For example, an organization may be considered as comprising a series of other entities (such as departments, people, processes, resources), all of which can affect one another. Structures are nested within structures (Easton, 2010); this is relevant considering the dual-level model of corporate brand positioning introduced earlier (see Figure 9). How is a series of entities, such as departments and people on corporate and business levels, internally related when positioning the brand? And how do they affect each other? These questions also closely connect to the part of the research question that aims at identifying the actors and their roles within the structures in which they operate. To reiterate, there is no “structure / agency problem”, but “structure / structure” or “agency / agency” problems instead (Gorski, 2013, p. 669).

### *Necessary and Contingent Relations*

Critical realists argue that there are two kinds of relationships among entities: necessary and contingent relationships (Easton, 2010). In the context of this thesis, organizations and corporate brands have a *necessary* causal relation, since one (corporate brand) *must* exist along with the other (organization). *Contingent* relationships are those that exist between bodies that *can* exist independently, but can nevertheless influence one another (Easton, 2002). For example, a certain business unit may affect the implementation of a new or updated corporate brand positioning strategy, or it may not. To conclude, the distinction between contingent and necessary relations recognizes that entities can have some relations (necessary) that *will* affect one another, and some (contingent) that *may* affect one another (Easton, 2010).

### *Structure of Causal Explanation*

The most fundamental aim of critical realism is explanation. In other words, critical realism aims to answer the question: “What caused those events to happen?” An entity (corporate brand), having structures (identity or associations) and necessarily possessing causal powers (influencing other entities such as stakeholders) and

liabilities (suffering from a reputation crisis), will under specific conditions (for instance, new CEO decides to change the intended corporate brand position) result in an event (for instance, strategy meeting to start the repositioning process). In practice, such formal explanations will not normally be possible due to the complexity of real-world behavior, but they do provide a logical framework to guide case researchers. Seeking to explain how corporate brand positioning occurs over time made it necessary for me to generate as much empirical material as possible until epistemological closure (however flawed and temporary) was obtained (Easton, 2010).

### *Mechanisms*

Mechanisms concern the ways things act (Bhaskar, 1975). A causal explanation is one that identifies entities and the mechanisms that combine and connect them, causing events to occur. The term ‘mechanism’ has problematic connotations, since it implies clear structure and invariance in operation, something that critical realists principally reject. However, ‘mechanism’ has become embedded in the language community, and will be used hereafter with an understanding of ‘deep generative processes and structures’ (Easton, 2010). Importantly, mechanisms’ explanatory features do not need to be linear additive as required by statistical models; instead, they can be metaphorical in nature (Easton, 2010). Reed (2005, p. 1639) outlined that it is the “deeper level of social and organizational reality, not readily available to direct observation or description, the level of the generative mechanisms or structures that produce, reproduce and transform particular organizational forms and managerial processes, that remains central to the kind of explanatory knowledge that realist-based researchers seek.” This brings me back to the practical considerations of doing processual case research.

### *Multiple Case Studies with Embedded Design*

Case studies can involve single or multiple cases, as well as several levels of analysis (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). My choice of doing comparative case study research has the strength of generating and developing theory, as insights often arise from combining contradictory or paradoxical indications (Eisenhardt, 1989). As a response to the limited understanding of corporate brand positioning processes, I conducted retrospective as well as real-time case studies within three globally operating, multi-business engineering firms, in order to allow for an in-depth exploration from different perspectives. The study focused on several case studies, with multiple embedded cases in each context (Yin, 2009), which mirrors the need of better understanding how numerous business units and product areas are coordinated under the corporate brand and its positioning strategy. While the first two case companies, ABB and Trelleborg, clearly focus their brand strategy and architecture on the corporate mother brand, the third, Holmen, mostly focuses on business unit-level

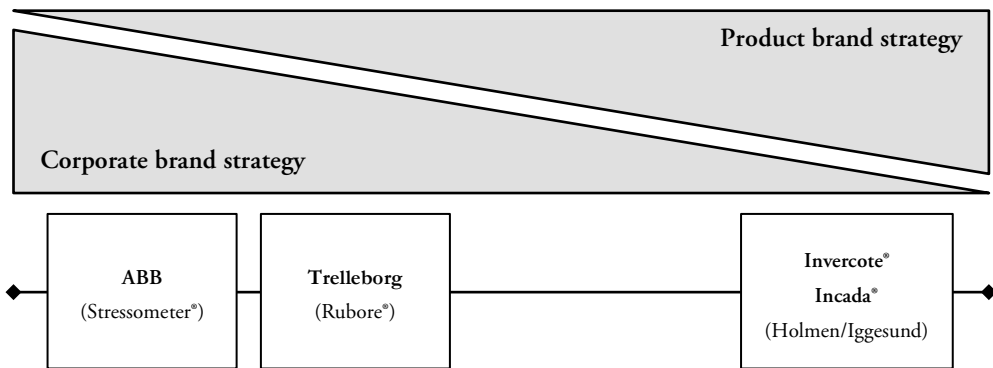
daughter brands. This case selection supports the strategy of first selecting similar case study *contexts* to replicate findings and extend emergent theory, while the third case study establishes a different theoretical category to provide possibly contrasting results, but for predictable reasons (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009). In other words, ABB and Trelleborg were selected with literal replication in mind, while Holmen was meant to add a theoretical replication perspective (Yin, 2009).

### ***Case Company Choice: ABB, Trelleborg, and Holmen***

The key characteristics that make ABB, Trelleborg, and Holmen interesting research objects are their organizational structure, heritage, and increasingly dominant brand logic (such as increasing investments in systematic brand management). As for organizational structure, ABB and Trelleborg, in particular, feature immense organizational complexity due to multiple business areas, business units, and product groups. Moreover, the liability of being (former) conglomerates provides an interesting context for studying brand positioning processes. Considering the aspect of heritage, all three companies possess a long history, dating back hundreds of years. A long brand heritage and track record makes it interesting to investigate positioning thinking and doing, both retrospectively and in real-time. Finally, what makes the selected cases especially interesting is the increasingly dominant brand logic manifested in the companies, such as increasing resources for brand management and enhanced status for executive management. As the corporate brand is increasingly relevant for management executives and illustrates many of the complexities I seek to investigate, the selected companies promise to enrich the knowledge regarding corporate brand positioning.

ABB is headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland, and operates mainly in power and automation technologies. ABB's businesses are structured in a management scheme that currently comprises five divisions and multiple units and product areas. ABB adopts a strategy in which the mother brand guarantees the quality and added value of the whole portfolio. Trelleborg, which focuses primarily on polymer technology and is headquartered in Trelleborg, Sweden, similarly employs a management scheme comprising five divisions and multiple units and product areas, and adopts a mother brand strategy. However, Trelleborg's brand strategy explicitly leaves space for tactical daughter brands, in which the credibility of the mother brand supports the daughter brand's identity. Holmen is headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden, and operates in pulp and paper technologies. Holmen's business management is structured into three product-oriented and two raw-material-oriented divisions. Holmen adopts a daughter-mother brand strategy in which the daughter brands are endorsed, while the mother brand serves as a seal of guarantee. All selected case companies operate in B2B markets and obtain leading market positions with most of their businesses.

ABB and Trelleborg, specifically, provide a typical case study context in terms of positioning a corporate brand to be relevant to many different customer groups and multiple non-customer stakeholders, across numerous business and product subdivisions. The organizational contexts of ABB and Trelleborg, as well as Holmen's, offered the opportunity to generate detailed qualitative data in order to extend the understanding of how corporate and business-level positioning processes unfold over time in multi-business firms. In sum, I argue that these organizational contexts are instrumental for illuminating and extending relationships of the research problem and aim, which is in line with a critical realist perspective (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Healy & Perry, 2000, p. 120; Stake, 1995). Figure 11 illustrates the case company choice based on varying corporate brand strategy degrees, and visually supports the selection strategy.



**Figure 11**

### Case company selection rationale

Choosing a case company and negotiating access to it does not end with the first contact offering an opening to the organization. For example, I had to withdraw from a potential case company after the initial contact, as it was not possible to gain further access. Once I passed the initial 'gatekeeper' in ABB, Trelleborg, and Holmen, the research relationships evolved through ongoing interaction with main company contacts, making some gatekeepers the key research respondents. In the following parts, I will explain in detail how case companies and company respondents were selected. Table 4 illustrates and summarizes case company context and embedded business-level case study context.

### *ABB Case Company Context*

Secondary sources gave the impression that ABB would be a suitable company for a case study, and company access confirmed this impression. The company has excelled in its recent brand-building initiatives, making it a good fit for an empirical investigation. Moreover, it is a large and complex firm with a diverse business portfolio and high decentralization. The case study conditions fit the five internally consistent assumptions of doing process research: embeddedness of processes across several analysis levels, temporal interconnectedness between past, present, and future, explanation of context and action, search for holistic rather than linear process explanations, and a need to link process analysis to the location and explanation of outcomes (Pettigrew, 1997).

I initially contacted ABB during a branding workshop in Västerås, Sweden, in early 2011. Participants came from the Force Measurement BU, part of the ABB Process Automation division. Here, to clarify the dimensions of my research, it is important to emphasize that a business unit within ABB certainly equals an enormous international business. During the initial meeting, I learned that the Force Measurement products (such as Stressometer) needed to have their own values, and a life of their own within the long-term ambition to have an overall ABB brand that communicates solid understanding of customer needs. This fueled my interest in exploring the positioning activities, power relations, and possible tensions inherent in the structural set-up. I took the opportunity to, in person, ask Force Measurement representatives if they would consider participating in a research project on the phenomenon of positioning. After the event, and once the research plan expectations from both sides were clarified, ABB Force Measurement agreed to participate. The face-to-face meeting was an important step in gaining access to the company. Additionally, engaging with business-unit individuals, who regarded the topics of 'brand' and 'positioning' as clearly important, underlined not only the theoretical importance of the research aim, but also its managerial relevance. In November 2011, I conducted a first set of interviews at the Force Measurement facilities, in Västerås, where observed the setting and gathered potentially useful documents. I selected interview participants based on observations made during the workshop and on their potential for providing business-level insights. In addition, the main contact at Force Measurement recommended useful respondents, working operationally with the brand-related matters as product managers.

Following this set of interviews, I chose to deepen my understanding of brand positioning by interviewing knowledgeable corporate-level respondents. The rationale was to find a balance between corporate-level and business-level managerial views. I first approached ABB Sweden's head of communications, and subsequently spoke with the head of global branding, who was operationally responsible for global corporate brand management activities. To deepen the understanding of ABB's brand positioning process from past to present, I contacted ABB's former head of group corporate communications, who held the position from the mid-1990s until the mid-

2000s. Next, I contacted the founding CEO in order to get insights regarding the early thinking behind creating the ABB brand. Finally, I contacted the current head of group corporate communications to glean insights on current developments.

#### *Trelleborg Case Company Context*

Trelleborg was selected as a second case company because in addition to fitting the research problem and aim, it has been investing in corporate branding over the past years. The case study conditions also fit the five aforementioned internally consistent assumptions of doing process research.

After making the first contact with Trelleborg in early 2011, I presented the research plan to the head of corporate communications, who agreed to be part of the research. During the meeting in May 2011, I was also introduced to the recently employed brand & marketing director, who would become the main contact person throughout the three years of my positioning studies. Similar to ABB, the Trelleborg case study started with a retrospective investigation of corporate brand positioning. However, Trelleborg became a real-time case, due to current brand repositioning and management developments. Therefore, the Trelleborg case study can be referred to as the longitudinal single-site study in a dual methodology of case study research and its synergy with replicated multiple cases (Leonard-Barton, 1990). As for selecting potentially valuable and knowledgeable respondents, I started with interviewing corporate-level marketing and strategic development managers. With Trelleborg, the rationale was also to find a balance between corporate-level and business-level managerial views. For the business level, I selected Sealing Solutions Kalmar, which utilizes both the Trelleborg corporate brand and a daughter brand. Following the development of real-time corporate brand repositioning, I conducted multiple follow-up interviews with the operational project leader. Moreover, I selected further potentially useful respondents, such as corporate- and business-level managers in different functions and across all Trelleborg's divisions, as well as a brand consultant.

#### *Holmen Case Company Context*

Holmen was selected as a third case company due to the polar-type context of the company (Eisenhardt, 1989; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Pettigrew, 1990). Holmen is also a large multi-business firm with a decentralized structure, but pursues a corporate brand strategy to a lesser extent than the other case companies. Its Iggesund Paperboard division, however, uses a clear product brand strategy with its brands Invercote and Incada, whereas Iggesund and Holmen, as corporate brands, serve as the seal of guarantee. Holmen also fits the five internally consistent assumptions of doing process research.

As for selecting potentially valuable respondents, I initially gained access to Holmen's Printing Paper division. Since the Iggesund Paperboard business would be more revealing as a polar-type case study due the strong focus on product branding, I contacted the business unit's market communication director, who was mentioned

during the initial interviews, and eventually conducted interviews within Iggesund Paperboard. Finally, I further selected a potentially useful respondent from Holmen's corporate level.

**Table 4**  
Case company overview

Company	Headquarter	History	Brand strategy	Core businesses
ABB	Zurich, Switzerland	Formally created in 1988 through a merger between Swedish ASEA (founded in 1883) and Swiss Brown Boveri (founded in 1891).	Mother brand strategy, in which the mother brand ABB guarantees the quality and added value of the whole portfolio.	Power Products, Power Systems, Discrete Automation and Motion, Low Voltage Products, and Process Automation.
ABB Force Measurement	Västerås, Sweden	The first generation of Pressductor transducers (the technology behind the products) was developed at former ASEA in 1953 and patented in 1954.	Mother brand ABB together with product name such as the unit's flagship product <i>Stressometer</i> .	Force measurement products designed to improve control, productivity and quality in a wide variety of processes and industries.
Trelleborg	Trelleborg, Sweden	Founded in 1905 as Trelleborgs Gummifabriks AB, the company soon became Scandinavia's leading rubber-production company.	Mother-daughter brand strategy, in which the credibility of the mother brand Trelleborg is the basis of the daughter brand's identity.	Coated Systems, Industrial Solutions, Offshore and Construction, Sealing Solutions, and Wheel Systems.
Trelleborg Sealing Solutions Kalmar	Kalmar, Sweden	Founded in 1988 as Rubore AB and producing brake shims for passenger cars. Trelleborg acquired the company in 1992.	<i>Rubore</i> brand name for brake-shim products and Trelleborg brand for NVH Laminate products.	Noise damping shims and insulators for disc brake pads, noise damping laminates, tuned absorbers for low-frequency brake noise, etc.
Holmen	Stockholm, Sweden	Company history dates back to 1609. Today Holmen is a forest industry group with product-oriented and raw-material-oriented businesses.	Daughter-mother brand strategy, in which the daughter brands are endorsed while the mother brand serves as a seal of guarantee.	Holmen Paper, Iggesund Paperboard, Holmen Timber, Holmen Skog, and Holmen Energi.
Igesund Paperboard	Igesund, Sweden	Company was founded in 1685, focusing initially on ironworks. Paperboard production started in 1963. Part of the Holmen Group since a merger in 1988.	Product brand strategy with super premium brand <i>Invercote</i> and functional premium brand <i>Incada</i> .	Specialist supplier of high-quality paperboards to targeted market segments with a focus on innovation, efficiency and excellent service.



## ***Case Selection and Unit of Analysis***

The previous discussion should have clarified that the phenomenon in this thesis is corporate brand positioning, which ought to be studied in the context of the case companies ABB, Trelleborg, and Holmen. Yin (2009) illustrated that cases can be individuals, small groups, entire organizations, partnerships, communities, relationships, decisions, or projects. However, cases can also be defined temporally as with events or processes (Langley, 1999). More specifically, cases can be defined as episodes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Having had a conceptual idea about studying positioning processes from the beginning, the actual empirical material prompted more clearly defining the cases as episodes. Identifying and studying such episodes retrospectively and in real-time means that though cases were not chosen beforehand, once positioning episodes emerged as cases from the empirical material, they were “selected” to extend emerging theory and to fill in theoretical research categories (Eisenhardt, 1989). This was done on the basis of discovering events of change related to positioning ABB, Trelleborg, and Holmen (such as changes in strategy, changes in personnel etc.). All episodes discovered during the research were analyzed in order to understand them on their own terms and in their specific context. Specifically, the strategy to “temporally bracket” distinct episodes permitted the creation of “comparative units of analysis for the exploration and replication of theoretical ideas” (Langley, 1999, p. 703). This is why I regard *cases* and the *unit of analysis* as one and the same (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009). However, it is essentially the individuals that have been purposefully selected and their knowledge that collectively constitute the unit of analysis (Grünbaum, 2007). Consequently, unit of analysis refers to the specific knowledge necessary to answer the research aim and question, which in turn was provided by key respondents as well as observations and documents. Key respondents were purposefully selected as explained in detail in the former chapter. What makes them key respondents (on both corporate and business level) was first and foremost based on their knowledge about branding and positioning as well as their direct (sometimes indirect) responsibility for branding and positioning activities.

## ***Research Process***

The research process can be best described as iterative, which involved “weaving back and forth between theory and data” and included inductive and deductive elements (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 14). Although the aim was to generate theory while developing a holistic picture, I understood both research questions and the theoretical constructs as tentative (Eisenhardt, 1989). The theoretical underpinnings of the focus on corporate brand positioning and the conceptual research model were meant to guide the empirical research process as a thinking and structuring tool, in order to

prevent an overwhelming amount of accumulated empirical material. Deductive research elements (theoretical lenses and tools) helped to identify the phenomenon of interest and suggested which mechanisms may be at play, providing links with previous research and literature. Inductive research elements (empirical material) provided process data to be explained and to test the explanations (Easton, 2010).

I used the research question of ‘how corporate brand positioning occurs over time’ as a matter of establishing the course of the project and with the aim of constructing or reconstructing a chronology of positioning events. Deciding where to start, where to stop, and what to look for needed to be a compromise between what the data indicated about the positioning process I investigated and what I theoretically could expect to be part of the process (Sminia, 2009, p. 100). Being aware of the chance of making causal misattributions, given the complexities of the systems one researches, I put forward different causal explanations (mechanisms of change). With critical realist lenses, this is not only a possible choice, but also pragmatically desirable one (Sayer, 2000).

## **Generating Process Data**

The goal of process-focused case studies is to collect data that emphasizes action and structure over time and is comparative, pluralist, historical, and contextual (Pettigrew, 1990). Since data in a social environment does not consist of objects, I use the term ‘data generation’ (Gummesson, 2005). As this thesis draws on temporally unfolding brand positioning phenomena in rich detail, the data source incorporates all ‘big three’ of qualitative research, which are known to have complementary strengths and weaknesses (Langley, 2011): interviews (retrospective and real-time; individual and group), archival documents (internal and external; public and private), and observations (non-participant; informal).

### ***Interviews***

I chose interviews as the main data generation source because they are temporally adaptable via respondents’ memories (Langley, 2011). Once I arranged for initial contacts in each case company, I needed to work forward through the organization in order to access potential key respondents (as elaborated upon earlier). I conducted in-depth interviews with executive and middle managers situated at different firm levels (that is, corporate and business level) and at different functions (that is, general, marketing, brand, sales, product, and communication managers). In addition, I combined retrospective interviews to investigate past events with real-time interviews that examined current events. In total, I conducted 41 interviews (see Table 5).

**Table 5**

List of case company respondents (#=Interview count, \*=Telephone interview)

Org. level	Name	Position	Date	#
ABB Corporate	Percy Barnevik	CEO, 1988-1996; Chairman, 1997-2001	Jan 25, 2013	1*
	Björn Edlund	Head of Corporate Communications, 1998-2005	Nov 27, 2013	1*
	Clarissa Haller	Head of Corporate Communications, 2005-2014	Jan15, 2013	1*
	Maria Jobin	Head of Global Branding	May 24, 2012	1*
	Suzanne Lagerholm	Head of Communications, Sweden	May 8, 2012	1*
ABB Force Measurement	George Fodor	System Development Manager	Dec 1, 2011	1
	Peter Fixell	Product & Market Development Manager	Dec 1, 2011 Dec 2, 2011	2
	Martin Ottoson	Market Communication Manager	Dec 1, 2011	1
	Torbjörn Wallenius	Division Web Manager & Art Director	Dec 1, 2011	1
	Eva Wadman	Product Manager	Dec 1, 2011	1
	Lars Karlsson	Product Manager	Dec 1, 2011	1
	Ulf Carlqvist	Product Manager	Dec 1, 2011	1
Trelleborg Corporate	Viktoria Bergman	Head of Corporate Communications, 2003-2011	Sep 6, 2011	1
	Patrik Romberg	Head of Corporate Communications	Jan 29, 2014	1
	Stefan Svärdenborn	Brand & Marketing Director	Jun 17, 2011 May 4, 2012 Oct 5, 2012 Oct 22, 2013	4
	Gunilla Annehed	Communication Manager	Jun 21, 2011	1
	Rosman Jahja	Communication Manager	Jun 17, 2011	1
	Fredrik Meuller	Strategic Development Director	Sep 5, 2011	1
	Sofie Ebbestrand	Corporate Brand Manager	Nov 7, 2013	1
	Stefan Lundström	Managing Director	Jan 18, 2012	1
	Anders Broberg	Sales & Marketing Director	Jan 18, 2012 Oct 23, 2013	2
	Ulf Johansson	Plant Manager	Jan 18, 2012	1
Trelleborg Sealing Solutions Kalmar	Arvid Norberg	Product Manager	Jan 18, 2012	1
	Robert Ackesjö	Purchasing Manager	Jan 18, 2012	1
Additional Trelleborg Businesses	Richard Hepworth	Managing Director, Marine Systems	Nov 2, 2012	1*
	Susanna Schneeberger	Marketing & Sales Director, Industrial Solutions	Dec 5, 2012	1
	Robert Zahiri	Global Marketing & Communications Director, TSS	Jul 24, 2013	1*
	Lorenzo Ciferri	Marketing Director, Agricultural & Forestry Tires	Nov 27, 2013	1
Consultant	Johan Frithiof	Commercial Director, Engineered Fabrics	Nov 27, 2013	1
Consultant	Hugo Mann	Account Director, BBDO (now DDB), Stockholm	Aug 30, 2013	1
Holmen Corporate	Ingela Carlsson	Head of Corporate Communications	Nov 19, 2013	1
	Tommy Wiksand	Sales & Development Director	Oct 4, 2012	1
Holmen Paper	Jonas Lindell	Manager Public Communications	Oct 4, 2012	1
	Guy Mallinson	Business Director, Packaging & Graphics Europe	Jan 8, 2014	1*
Iggesund Paperboard	Carlo Einarsson	Market Communications Director, 2005-2013	Apr 24, 2013 Apr 25, 2013	2

The semi-structured interviews used prepared questions that left a great deal of freedom in the way one could reply (Bryman & Bell, 2007). I prepared an interview guide to create a flow in the interviews and to plan prompts, while still giving full attention to the respondents' answers (Bryman & Bell, 2007; McCracken, 1988). Follow-up questions exceeding the structured guideline had the aim of identifying

and cultivating empirical material on categories and relationships that had not been anticipated and that emerged throughout the research process. In this way, the structured interview questions provided themes for discussion and a guided conversation (Yin, 2009). Eighty percent of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, while some were conducted via telephone. In the beginning of each interview, I briefly introduced the research topic and informed the subjects about confidentiality and that quotes might be published. Respondents were offered anonymity, but none chose this option. Only one respondent objected to being tape-recorded. After each interview, I transcribed all tape-recorded interviews.

### ***Archival Documents***

Organizational documents are an important source of data on key event chronologies, and often provide records of arguments and justifications (Langley, 2011). For this study, company documents were an important brand positioning data source. More specifically, I used external and internal documentary information in order to explore historical corporate and product brand positioning efforts. To address the difficulty of “find[ing] out what happened in the past by asking present-day respondents”, the solution was to navigate between the diverse data sources (Silverman, 2011, p. 192). Public domain documents included, for instance, annual reports, mission statements, press releases, external company magazines, and advertisements. Internal documents included brand policy, brand books, code of conduct brochures, brand strategy guidelines, internal and external correspondence, and digital channel communication such as company intranet and newsletters (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

### ***Non-Participant Observation***

I found that observations were important for understanding evolving patterns of interaction and behavior during corporate brand positioning activities. For example, including non-participant observation as a form of organizational ethnography to generate real-time positioning process data in Trelleborg further developed insider perspectives on corporate brand strategies. In this study, the observer-as-participant most accurately describes my use of observational methods available to business researchers (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Observational notes varied from ‘mental notes’, ‘scratch notes’, and ‘full field notes’ that were later refined (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Supplementing interviews with non-participant observation addressed potential differences between what people think and feel compared to what they actually do (Silverman, 2011).

I found Trelleborg’s *Marketing Council* committee to be key in the continual corporation branding and repositioning process. Therefore, it was important to gain

first-hand insights into what was taking place therein, where corporate-level managers and managers from various business units as well as brand consultants sat together to discuss the Trelleborg corporate brand. The strengths of including this direct observation are twofold: first, the observation covered an important real-time event in the brand positioning process; second, observational material gave a good picture of the case context and key respondents (Yin, 2009, p. 102). I was granted access to the *Marketing Council's* meeting in two occasions: the first time during the position strategizing period in 2012, and the second time during implementation in 2013.

In addition, less formal observations were conducted throughout field visits to all case companies. Visiting and observing ABB's and Trelleborg's trade-fair booths at the world's biggest industrial fair in Hanover, Germany, was another way of gaining insights into how ABB and Trelleborg externally position their brand(s). During this field trip I was able to informally speak with ABB and Trelleborg brand representatives, receiving an even better picture of the case contexts. I was also able to experience the visual translation of the brand's positioning strategies and how employees and visitors perceived them. The various observations and informal discussions helped me better understand the context for and outcomes of corporate brand positioning.

## Temporal Orientation in Process Research

Process researchers can address their subject either by "tracing it backward into the past" (that is, retrospective case studies), "following it forward into the future" (that is, longitudinal case studies), or tracing both backward *and* forward at the same time (Langley, 2011, p. 413). While these options create some important tradeoffs, combining longitudinal studies and retrospective studies provides the researcher with complementary empirical material. While retrospective data generation attempts to generate sharper conceptualizations of corporate brand positioning, real-time attempts lead to deeper and richer understandings of how corporate brand positioning projects unfold (Langley, 2011). I used both 'tracing back' and 'following forward' strategies to best answer the research aim and question.

### *Tracing Back*

Explanatory narratives inspired by critical realism attempt to link recurring cycles of pre-existing structural conditioning, emergent social interaction, and structural elaboration or transformation in relation to specific sequences of organizational restructuring embedded in particular historical and institutional contexts (Reed, 2005). Thus, I began with an intensive historical and structural analysis of pre-

existing institutional forms that shape and frame the emergence and trajectory of brand-related managerial strategies and practices as they developed in response to the challenges and threats presented by pre-existing structures.

In exploring the past, the researcher typically has an idea about what a process model will have to explain, and can focus the data generation onto the elements that seem most likely linked to the outcome (Langley, 2011). In the case of ABB, for example, it was a strong brand image and position (outcome) that triggered investigating the internal processes that most likely led to this external perception. Also, the case contexts of Holmen and Trelleborg were partly based on studying processes retrospectively. I reconstructed temporal chronologies from archival documents and interviews in order to make the studies' approach most efficient and effective. The feasible time investment required in 'tracing back', compared to relatively time-consuming 'following forward' observations, was also helpful for cross-case comparisons (Langley, 2011).

### ***Following Forward***

There are occasions in research when real-time 'following forward' is a natural and highly tempting choice (Langley, 2011). After investigating challenges and threats that pre-existing structures present, I moved on to explore, partly longitudinally and comparatively, the impact of these emergent managerial strategies and practices on subsequent phases of institutional and organizational restructuring (Reed, 2005). In the case of Trelleborg, a strong brand image and position outcome was rather unknown at the time access was granted to follow in real time; a position change initiative was just about to begin. Limiting the real-time study to understanding the internal brand positioning development process helped to avoid uncertainty, frustration, or even data overload (Leonard-Barton, 1990); I was able to examine how the positioning project unfolded up to the point when internal brand positioning was being implemented.

## **Making Sense of Process Data**

The iterative process of weaving back and forth between theory and data is the central idea behind theory development (Eisenhardt, 1989; Bryman & Bell, 2007). A range of process data strategies was available, which may produce different types of conceptual products. The approach I adapted is similar to the one recommended and described by Eisenhardt (1989): first, I analyzed the empirical material generated within cases before starting to search for cross-case patterns. The overall idea was to become intimately familiar with each case as a stand-alone entity, allowing the unique

patterns of each case to emerge before moving to generalizing patterns across cases (Langley, 2011).

### ***Within-Case Analysis***

I approached within-case process analysis via writing case narratives, visually mapping key positioning incidents and events, and bracketing distinct temporal phases within each case company context individually (Langley, 1999). In particular, temporal bracketing helped to uncover specific positioning macro-episodes over time, as reported in the case-selection chapter. With regard to ABB, I discovered three cases (that is, macro-episodes) of corporate brand positioning; with the Trelleborg corporate brand, two cases were revealed. In total, five cases of corporate brand positioning change processes were utilized for corporate-level case analysis. With regard to positioning the corporate brand at business level, the ABB and Trelleborg businesses were selected to gain insights into how the corporate brand is utilized for positioning products and solutions. Holmen's polar-type case study context revealed no concrete corporate-level positioning episode, though for predictable reasons. However, two positioning macro-episodes were discovered within the selected Iggesund Paperboard business that refined previous findings (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990). Detailed and descriptive case study write-ups were central to generating insights, and helped with the early-analysis data volume (Eisenhardt, 1989).

After the initial within-case analysis of temporal-bracketing positioning episodes, each case was further analyzed to gain a richer understanding of brand position update processes. At the same time, I assessed research model usefulness and suitability by allocating each case's corporate brand positioning components to the various theoretical framework categories (Eisenhardt, 1989). In other words, interview transcripts, documents, and observational material were coded according to the research model (see Table 6). The coding procedure helped to better "understand what is still unclear, by putting names on incidents and events, trying to cluster them, communicating with others around some commonly held ideas, and trying out enveloping concepts against another wave of observations and conversations" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 62). I also used tables to order events, activities, and choices, and to refine constructs and theoretical relationships (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After writing narratives for each case, I summarized the findings in tables presented at the end of each chapter. Using the case narratives, the research model, and summary tables for 'writing-up' each case further allowed for a cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2009).

**Table 6**

## Exemplary interview questions and corresponding codes for analysis

Examples of interview questions	Categories / Codes for analysis
What is your understanding of the brand strategy and how is the relationship with corporate strategy? / What are the most important stakeholder groups for corporate- or business-level branding?	Context
What are the reasons for investing in corporate brand positioning activities? / What was the motivation to initiate this positioning / repositioning project?	Drivers
Do you see any historical events that were crucial for building the brand over time? / Do you remember particular events when positioning was discussed?	Events
Who were major participants and what was their role? / What was your role during the process?	Actors
What were the steps and activities in brand positioning? / What did you do in order establish a position for the corporate brand?	Activities
What were major challenges throughout this project?	Challenges
What were moments of success in corporate brand position finding?	Outcomes

***Cross-Case Analysis***

Cross-case analysis is essential for multiple-case studies (Yin, 2009). Therefore, the second analysis phase focused on composing a cross-case analysis to examine similarities and differences. In process analysis, a common objective is to identify repetitive temporal patterns among event activities and choices seen in the empirical material. I followed Langley's (2011) advice to ask the following questions during cross-case pattern finding phases: How are events ordered? What is the typical sequence of phases? Are there different paths and cycles through the phases? What are the branch points where different paths may diverge? How are phases and activities interconnected? I found organizational change concepts to be helpful in understanding how corporate brand positioning occurred over time. In agreement with the research question, cross-case analysis was organized according to where and when positioning occurs (that is, location and timing), why it occurs (that is, drivers), what occurs (that is, activities, choices, and challenges), and who is involved (that is, actors and their roles). Following Langley (2011) and the inspiration from critical realism, I found that the empirically observed patterns needed some underlying logic that would enable the reader to understand why progression through phases would occur in precisely the way they do. This is where position change mechanisms complemented the positioning-process patterns initially found.



## Criteria for Assessing Research Quality: Trustworthiness

Four criteria are typically discussed when judging the quality of research designs: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 2009). However, these notions have been imported from particular kinds of quantitative research (such as applied psychology), making their meaning in the exploratory qualitative case study approach less clear and evident (Thomas, 2011). Arguably, it is the reliability part that is most pertinent to qualitative case research. In this context, the notion of trustworthiness has been developed to judge the quality of a case study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2010; Thomas, 2011). Several elements communicate trustworthiness in process-focused case study research (Langley, 2011). I adopted confirmability, credibility, dependability, suitability, generality, integrity, and transferability as constituents of trustworthiness throughout this thesis to meet the highest quality standards (see, for example, Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2011).

*Confirmability.* Throughout the research process, I pursued and generated relevant empirical material (based on the theoretical framework and research model) that was helpful in answering the research question. This included, for example, detecting knowledgeable respondents and conducting in-depth interviews. Discussing the empirical material with academic colleagues and advisors further accounted for the confirmability of the qualitative case studies.

*Credibility.* In order to increase credibility, I continually discussed the research problem, aim and plan, and process with academic advisors. As for the empirical material, I followed the recommendation to record the interviews electronically and to transcribe them (Yin, 2009; McCracken, 1988). Losing too much detail in process studies harms credibility (Langley, 2011). Hence, I included appropriate amounts of original textual material to corroborate the proposed conceptualization, as well as narratives attesting to close research site access.

*Dependability.* The dependability of research findings was naturally enhanced by the project's process-focused aim, and through intentionally including the historical development of the brands to better account for context and action in positioning.

*Suitability.* I addressed whether findings were in line with what I examined through the categories of credibility, dependability, and confirmability, as demonstrated above.

*Generality.* The inclusion of multiple case contexts was helpful to increase the generality of findings for multi-business firms operating in industrial markets. Additionally, multiple positioning cases (that is, episodes) and embedded business-level cases increased generality within each theoretical category, according to the research model. Finally, the number and length of interviews, many relevant internal and external documents, as well as non-participant and informal observations uncovered multiple brand positioning aspects.

*Integrity.* Before each interview, I introduced the research topic and informed the respondents about the confidentiality of the research and that interview quotes might be published in a thesis or paper. Respondents were offered anonymity in their answers. Before all interviews, I also asked respondents if they agreed to be tape-recorded. In addition, I endorsed presenting respondents ideas and reasoning in their own terms. All these aspects accounted for the integrity of the research approach.

*Transferability.* To increase transferability, I provided relevant background information about the case companies, as well as the context in which they are operating. I also provided detailed descriptions of brand-related developments over time and employed a standardized interview protocol. However, the semi-structured interview guidelines left enough space for nuances during the data generation process, as well as for altering or adding questions as the research process unfolded.

*Understanding.* I discussed the findings with my academic advisors, putting the findings under critical scrutiny. Moreover, I presented parts of my findings at an academic branding conference, thereby inviting academics to question and discuss them. I gave respondents (internal or external to the case companies) the opportunity to provide feedback on the empirical case descriptions. This undertaking increased the accuracy of my research and generated excellent additional case material. Finally, during the final phase of my research project, I presented its key findings and implications at a corporate brand management practitioner conference. Brand managers from various organizations confirmed the practical relevance of my research aim and findings.

## Blueprint for Empirical Case Descriptions

The research model (Chapter 3) guides each case study from chapter five to seven. Basic case company information is followed by *a brief history, organizational structure, competitive landscape, and choice of brand strategy*. Subsequently, in each case company context, I elaborate upon corporate-level brand positioning macro-episodes over time. All parts include a chapter on *brand positioning drivers, brand positioning action, brand positioning outcomes, and brand positioning challenges*. Each episode then summarizes findings according to these categories. Subsequent to the corporate-level positioning episodes, for each case are embedded cases of a selected business-level organization. The analytical description of brand positioning processes also follows the research model's logic to cover *brand positioning drivers, brand positioning action, brand positioning outcomes, and brand positioning challenges*. Each embedded case then summarizes findings according to these categories.

## Summary

This chapter's goal was to outline the research methodology for this study. The research problematization, aim, and question, as well as the theoretical framework and research model, closely guided the research design. An argumentation for process-focused case study design was followed by an ontological and epistemological discussion. What followed was a rationale for multiple-case studies in different company contexts, the unit of analysis as positioning change episodes, and the research process. Data generation choices such as interviews, documents, and non-participant observations were discussed. In a section regarding temporal orientation in process research, a focus on tracing back (historical analysis) as well as following forward (real-time analysis) with the empirical material was highlighted. This part was followed by a detailed description of case analysis choices and strategies (within- and across-case analysis). The chapter finished by listing criteria for assessing research quality and outlining a blueprint for presenting the empirical material. The following three chapters will present the empirical case narratives.

# Chapter 5 | Positioning ABB

## About the Case Company

ABB Ltd. (ABB) is a leader in power and automation technologies that enable utility and industry customers to improve their performance while lowering environmental impact. The ABB Group of companies operates in around 100 countries and employs about 150,000 people. The company holds a strong position in several markets and offers products and services for automating and improving industrial and commercial processes. ABB operates in Europe, the Americas, Asia, and the Middle East and Africa. It is headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland (Datamonitor, 2011).



**Figure 12**  
ABB logo

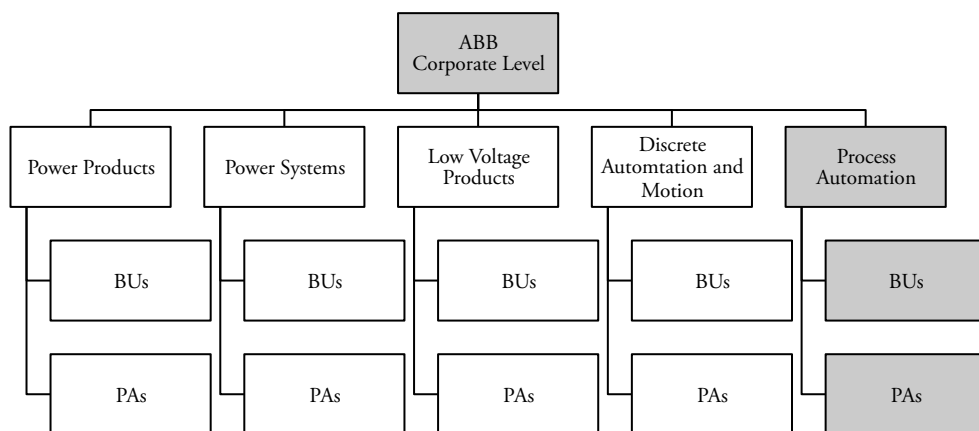
### ***Brief History***

The ABB Group was formally created in 1988 through a merger between Swedish ASEA AB and Swiss BBC Brown Boveri AG. ASEA, founded in 1883, was a major participant in introducing electricity into Swedish homes and businesses, and in developing Sweden's railway network. Later, the company expanded into power, mining, and steel. BBC Brown Boveri AG was formed in Switzerland in 1891 and initially specialized in power generation and turbines. The company then expanded

throughout Europe and broadened its operations to include a wide range of electrical engineering activities (ABB Ltd., 2009).

### ***Organizational Structure***

ABB's business management structure currently comprises five divisions: *Power Products*, *Power Systems*, *Low Voltage Products*, *Discrete Automation and Motion*, and *Process Automation* (Figure 13). All five divisions operate across two key markets for ABB; that is, power and automation. While the power market primarily uses products, systems, and services designed to deliver electricity, the automation market is mainly designed to improve product quality, energy efficiency, and productivity in industrial and manufacturing applications. The company maintains seven corporate research centers around the world and has continued to invest in research and development (R&D) through all market conditions, to work on technologies and stay ahead of industry trends.



***Figure 13***

ABB organizational structure

This case study investigates positioning processes at the ABB corporate and business levels. The Force Measurement Group and its Stressometer product family, part of the *Process Automation* division, acts as an embedded case for investigating the corporate brand positioning process as it relates to the business and product brand perspective.

## ***Competitive Landscape***

ABB operates in a highly competitive market. Intense competition is a major threat for the company's margins and market shares. The company competes on the basis of product performance, developing integrated systems and applications, pricing, and new product introduction time, as well as customer service. On a global basis, ABB's divisions compete with companies such as Siemens, Alstom, Areva, General Electric, Schneider Electric, Fanuc Robotics, Kuka Robot Group, Emerson, or Honeywell (Datamonitor, 2011).

## ***Brand Strategy***

The corporate brand ABB is supposed to guarantee the quality and added value of the whole portfolio. ABB defines a brand primarily as a name with power to influence the market. Yet, what really turns a name into a brand is a set of associations and relationships developed over time among customers, distributors, and other stakeholders. ABB exploits two major advantages of having a brand strategy: first, it is identifiable by its brand; second, the brand differentiates its products from others in the marketplace (ABB Brand Positioning Paper, unpublished internal document). The company's strategy is to acquire companies that complement its product range and geographical presence, in order to strengthen both its business and brand (Datamonitor, 2011). ABB's 'one brand, one company' strategy results in the trademarked statement of purpose and company vision summary: *Power and Productivity for a Better World* (ABB Ltd., 2009; see Figure 14).



***Figure 14***

ABB logo with tagline

## ***Brand Position and Perception***

International market intelligence and data analysis companies ascribe to ABB a 'strong brand image' resulting in a significant domestic and international competitive advantage. Moreover, 'global operations', 'high brand recognition', and 'regional

brand identity' allow ABB to decrease dependencies on single markets and to charge premium prices, leading to relatively higher margins compared with ABB's competitors (Datamonitor, 2011).

## Brand Positioning at Corporate Level

Analyzing the ABB corporate brand revealed three macro-positioning blocks (as described in the methodology section). These high-level episodes were given the role of the case within the overall ABB research context; they are systematically described and explained below, considering how the context affects the processes occurring in each macro-episode.

### Positioning a Multi-Domestic Firm (1988–1997)

Percy Barnevik was the driving force behind the merger between ASEA and Brown Boveri (see Figure 15 for heritage logos), aiming to build a multi-domestic organization. He was CEO from 1988 to 1996 and Chairman of the Board from 1997 to 2001. During his leadership, Barnevik was described as a corporate pioneer, acting and moving more aggressively than any CEO in Europe or even in the world to build a new competitive corporation model. His vision was to build an organization that combined global scale and technology with deep roots in local markets. Three internal contradictions or paradoxes characterized ABB: operating globally *and* locally, being big *and* small, and having a radical decentralization structure *and* a centralized reporting and control system at the same time. These contradictions needed to be resolved to create organizational advantage, as Barnevik revealed. To cope with these contradictions, a structure was needed to facilitate quick decision-making and careful monitoring of world developments. Therefore, decentralization and a matrix organizational structure were chosen to make activities and operations as simple and local as possible. Eventually, ABB became an industrial showcase corporation (Taylor, 1991).

The logo for ASEA, consisting of the letters 'ASEA' in a bold, orange, sans-serif font.The logo for Brown Boveri, consisting of the letters 'BBC' in a bold, black, sans-serif font above the words 'BROWN BOVERI' in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

**Figure 15**

ASEA and Brown Boveri heritage logos

## ***Brand Positioning Drivers***

In a *Harvard Business Review* interview from 1991, Barnevik characterized ABB as an organization built through acquisitions and restructurings. Even today, ABB respondents refer to this initial episode as a time when “a company was bought almost every day”. Many of the companies ABB bought had been around for more than 100 years and were also local industry leaders, comparable even to national monuments. Therefore, the ABB brand was very much driven by the corporate strategy, as explained by Björn Edlund, former head of corporate communications. Since a new corporation was formed following the merger, there was an urgent need to create a brand with a new identity and image. Internally, various stakeholders needed to be aligned; externally, a coherent image needed to be created. Finally, the CEO’s vision to create a ‘showcase corporation’ emerged as the driving force behind the corporate brand’s initial positioning.

## ***Brand Positioning Action***

When Barnevik shaped ABB, the focus was on creating a good image in order to evoke associations of an innovative and successful company, as he revealed in personal communication:

[The challenge] was not the position, the challenge was to manage the merger [...] ‘positioning’ and ‘brand’: I mean, that came automatically. The brand was ABB, everywhere, in the whole world, and with red color. (Barnevik, CEO, 1988-1996)

Barnevik explained that it was a combination of many things that “helped to build the image or position of the ABB name”. First of all, it was important to create a name after the merging of ASEA and Brown Boveri:

[After] lots of proposals for names [...] we finally settled with ‘ABB’ because it was easy to say and included the heritage of the other two names. There were some Greek names, some fancy names like ‘Sigma’, but I thought it was better to stay with that historical background. We succeeded surprisingly quickly to get that name accepted in the world – like IBM, and some other names like that. (CEO, 1988-1996)

Even though ABB was fairly new, the world very quickly became aware and interested in the corporation. Barnevik evaluates the choice of name as very suitable for building a position and a good image of the company:

So I think it was a very good choice of name. Then when you say positioning, we want, of course, that the name should have an image, which was later good for our customers, for the development, employees and so on. We had certain things that we stressed. (CEO, 1988-1996)



However, before reaching such an image, ABB's biggest challenge was to manage the merger on different levels, from internal cultural aspects to external political aspects. The goal was to create a certain kind of pride in ABB, accepting that every country has its own culture. Barnevik explained that many pre-conceived ideas needed to be resolved to create "an ABB that works together, where people trusted each other, relied on each other, respected different traditions and cultures". Focusing on the brand name was the solution for moving the merged companies forward:

[The brand name ABB] was what we lived with, that was our air, you know, 'ABB, ABB, we are ABB'. We don't talk about Brown Boveri anymore and we don't talk about ASEA. ABB is the new word and it is irreversible. You can never redo the merger. Some people looked back like 'Oh, it was better when we were Asea in Sweden, what the hell, why did we make that merger?' You had people who felt like that sometimes. Then it was important to rally around ABB. (CEO, 1988-1996)

Positive business press coverage, case studies on ABB in business schools, and 'best-company awards' in Europe for four consecutive years helped ABB to enhance pride internally:

One thing is for me to say that ABB is very good. Another thing is that the Financial Times is writing that ABB is very good. [...] It was important to get an early success story. (CEO, 1988-1996)

In summary, it was the challenge of the merger, the early success story, and the result of what the company actually did that created and positioned a strong brand, as the following quotation illustrates:

If we had not performed well, if we had lost money, if we got stuck in internal trouble, no PR firm could have changed that. [...] We were first in Europe to merge Eastern and Western Europe, we were innovating with the international matrix, we decentralized far more than anybody else; all these actions created the position. You can't sit with a PR expert and create a position; you do it by your action. [...] What I wanted to say is you get what you are making it to [...] It was a combined thing and I would warn against too much believing that a fantastic PR firm can help you with the image. You have to create an image yourself by your action, by your communication. Communication was important. (CEO, 1988-1996)

Edlund, head of corporate communications between 1998 and 2005, claimed that ABB had high brand awareness at the time Brown Boveri and ASEA merged. However, even though ABB had made 486 acquisitions between 1988 and 1993, it kept the previous management teams, changed the company logo, and basically used a very rudimentary accounting system to integrate earnings and profits from the different units, he explained. The former head of corporate communications refers to Barnevik as a 'very modern' and 'image- and perception-oriented manager':

ABB was very visible, but it wasn't very distinct nor did it have any breadth to it. It was present, but people didn't quite know what it stood for. [...] So they were very brand-savvy, but when I came in branding was more seen as a commercial proposition. But at the very top of the company they were also aware, I think very acutely aware, that this was still quite a loose federation. Even though the ABB brand was all-pervasive and very present, it was not really exactly clear what it stood for, and therefore you had all these sub-identities. (Edlund, Head of Corporate Communications, 1998-2005)

ABB did not spend a lot of money on branding compared to a consumer brand, Edlund continued. Their budget was spent on "refreshing the creative [aspects] and continuing to look at the tagline from time to time" instead. Other channels for communicating the ABB brand, in addition to the airport advertising, were business and news magazines like *The Economist* or *Der Spiegel*. Advertisements in these types of magazines were placed, as Edlund explained, when the budget at the beginning of the year still allowed for it. In addition, the local companies and their business units had a budget for trade-press advertising their products.

### ***Brand Positioning Outcomes***

Brand position outcomes during episode one can be summarized as follows. ABB quickly succeeded in getting the ABB brand name established worldwide after the merger between ASEA and Brown Boveri. Also, during the first three post-merger years, ABB doubled its profits. Positive business press coverage, 'best-company awards' for several years in a row, academic awards, and published case studies about 'the ABB way' of organizing a multinational corporation helped to position ABB as strong and attractive brand. Being ranked as 'most exciting and interesting company' allowed ABB to recruit many 'high-potentials'. However, the integration of the corporate communications department in corporate strategy discussions can be assessed as quite low during this episode. There was a strong focus on the visual identity brand aspect, especially the ABB logo.

### ***Brand Positioning Challenges***

A considerable challenge was to create an organizational structure that was able to handle the complexity of the new ABB organization. Finding a balance between being global and local, big and small, as well as being decentralized and having a centralized reporting and control system can also be mentioned as organizational challenges in positioning the new brand. The merger also required actions to convince stakeholders of unpopular decisions (such as layoffs) and connected challenges to succeed in this endeavor. Creating a culture of trust, reliance, and respect, in spite of many sub-

identities and cultural barriers, was an associated organizational challenge. Dealing with a decentralized structure that was badly organized in terms of business processes was a challenge that later proved to be a major obstacle in this episode. Additionally, not being able to keep the brand promise at all times (for instance, by exaggerating ‘green’ brand attributes) proved to be a challenge for the brand.

Table 7 summarizes empirical findings during episode one of corporate-level positioning.

**Table 7**

Summary of empirical findings during positioning episode one

Drivers	Action	Outcomes	Challenges
- ASEA and Brown Boveri merger	- Finding brand name	- Quick success in getting brand name established	- Finding balance between being global & local, big & small, centralized & decentralized
- CEO vision to create a showcase corporation	- Collaborating with external brand consultants	- Profit doubling after three post-merger years	- Convincing stakeholders of unpopular decisions (such as layoffs)
- Acquisition-driven conglomerate formation	- Determining envisioned brand characteristics	- Positive business press coverage	- Creating culture of trust, reliance, and respect despite many sub-identities
- Business-driven brand strategy	- Creating visual identity	- ‘Best company’ awards	- Dealing with consequences of not keeping true to brand promises
- Creating new identity and image	- Decentralizing organization	- Academic awards and published case studies	- Dealing with badly organized business processes
	- Internally preaching new brand name and values internally to overcome resistance	- Low integration of communication department in corporate strategy discussions	
	- Strategically communicating achievements and challenges for image-generation purposes	- Strong visual identity (logo) focus	
	- Communication department mainly working with PR and corporate fairs	- Understanding of ‘brand’ as name conveying an image	
	- Targeting airport billboards and business magazines to communicate brand position		

## Crisis, Turnaround, and Repositioning (2001–2005)

Edlund referred to this episode at ABB as a period in which the company went through “a number of changes and some pretty serious challenges”, eventually resulting in a “very, very deep crisis, which threatened the very existence of the company”. Barnevik referred to these crisis times as a phase in which “everything went wrong for a while”.

In 1997 ABB got a new CEO (Göran Lindahl, 1997–2000), with whom Edlund had “a branding discussion from the very first moment” they met. At that point, ABB already had a very active airport presence through billboard advertising, which Edlund referred to as a ‘smart’:

Locking yourself to positions [referring to contracts for media exposure] at the airport for a long time is not very expensive. This also meant that we have to have fresh creativity from time to time, because if you have all these big positions at the airport, you can’t just leave these corporate ads hanging there for years. (Head of Corporate Communications, 1998-2005)

Lindahl, the new CEO, needed help to “position ABB more in the societal field”, something that today would be called CSR. Lindahl’s intention was to “reposition the company slightly, because he was very aware of what was happening in the world of sustainability”, Edlund explained. ABB was negatively affected by the Asian financial crisis in 1997; this resulted in many employee layoffs in Germany and other countries. Edlund described ABB’s situation at the end of the 1990s as “pretty shaky”. Nevertheless, ABB was still “very much admired as an industrial showcase” when Edlund started in 1998, and remained “Europe’s most admired company on the Financial Times list”. After this initial mini-crisis, Lindahl “rode the wave of the new economy and the company was doing extremely well on the stock market”, but “in the meantime, things were boiling underneath.” Edlund referred to this statement as very important for the brand and its position. Several things then took place, as he explained. First, ABB sold two businesses under Lindahl’s leadership and with the full support of the board of directors. With the resulting cash advances, ABB launched a successful financial services business, which had a very high credit rating initially. Second, there was the new economy bubble around the millennium; this was another economic mini-crisis that negatively affected ABB. Third, exposure to asbestos insurance claims filed against an ABB daughter company (US company Combustion Engineering, acquired in 1989) increased ABB’s problems. Fourth, the financial services division that depended on borrowing money intensified the already turbulent situation. Finally, Edlund referred to a general economic weakness that took place at the end of the 1990s. The following quotation illustrates these points:

Also, [as a result of] the fact that ABB had expanded so fast in the years since it was put together in 1988, it was very, very badly organized in terms of business processes. [...] You had an unwieldy, huge corporation that was basically not well-organized, you had one threat from the asbestos delegation and you also had a financial service division in the company that was almost bankrupt because they had to pay high interest rates for the money that it was borrowing. So this was not a good time. (Head of Corporate Communications, 1998-2005)

### ***Brand Positioning Drivers***

CEO Lindahl left his position in 2001, with Jörgen Centerman succeeding him with the mission to further drive ABB's strategic shift toward being an industrial IT leader. Centerman resigned from his position after only one-and-a-half years as CEO. ABB's Chairman Jürgen Dormann then took the expanded role of both CEO and Chairman. Dormann had become chairman in late 2001 when Barnevik decided to resign from the position, due to a, "less good performance of ABB in recent years" (ABB Press Release, 2001). Soon after Barnevik left, potential pension overpayments to him and Lindahl were revealed; this issue caused some internal and external discord. According to Edlund, Dormann was an industry outsider, and somebody the company did not know well. Moreover, ABB appointed a new CFO in 2002. Dormann, together with the new CFO and the management team, then decided to do something about ABB's potential bankruptcy crisis. Through shifting corporate strategy while also re-focusing on the values that make ABB distinct, their response let the corporation eventually survive and start to thrive again.

### ***Brand Positioning Action***

Edlund remembers three things the new management team discussed: settling the asbestos liabilities; making sure that ABB did not 'throw good money after bad'; and, finally, focusing the company on its core strength. Edlund considered focusing on the business core as highly related to the ABB brand and recalled what happened when Dormann took over:

When Dormann came in, there was a more acute strategic understanding on his part, because he is such an experienced and brilliant manager. 'Brand' was not just a commercial thing; it had to go through the behavior, the culture, and the values. It was about making sure that people understand that the behavior is actually the brand as much as what you look like and what you say. (Head of Corporate Communications, 1998-2005)

Following Edlund's reasoning, the identity and core-value aspects came in as a response to a deep crisis. Suzanne Lagerholm, ABB's head of communications in

Sweden, also emphasized this key activity of working with the ABB values and what the company stood for when Dormann became CEO. According to Lagerholm, Dormann started an internal communication campaign to search for characteristics or words that “make ABB’s culture distinct”. Dormann, who from the beginning limited his appointment to no more than two years, introduced another tool for internally strengthening the ABB brand: in his 112 weeks as CEO, he composed weekly letters (“The Dormann Letters”) that were edited by Edlund.

Every Friday, we sent out a letter in 12 languages to all ABB staff about what was going on. Via a feedback button, [employees] could comment and send [Dormann] non-public input on each letter. That was very much part of the strategic conversation, which also had a branding aspect to it because it was very much about changing culture, changing behavior, and making people understand what the company stood for. [...] Almost like teachers, we came back to the same things over and over again so that people understand that this was a question of survival. (Head of Corporate Communications, 1998-2005)

Edlund thinks that the manner in which ABB actually grounded internal behavior was through the Dormann letters and what they “set loose in the company in terms of introspection and change of behavior”. However, such things only happen in a deep crisis, and it is not possible to just ‘switch them on’, he added. The importance of the crisis was also highlighted when Clarissa Haller, Edlund’s successor as head of corporate communications, mentioned her experience with employees talking about their proudest moments working for the company:

People get this special glittering in their eyes and then they tell the stories when ABB was close to bankruptcy and that really brought the team together. I think sometimes the negative, or the crisis stories actually have a much stronger impact on the culture of the company than the positive stories, the positive years when everything was just in perfect order. (Haller, Head of Corporate Communications, 2005-2014)

Edlund further recalled that the new management team dealt with questions such as ‘How do you focus?’; ‘What is the company really all about?’; ‘What is its core business?’; ‘How do you focus the company and all the communications about the company on this core business?’; and ‘How do you make it happen despite having to sell almost a third of non-core assets?’ The following quotation shows the decisions that were taken:

Basically, we decided ABB is about power technologies and it’s about automation technologies. It’s about making sure that customers can use energy better and also help the environment. That’s basically the statement that ABB still uses. (Head of Corporate Communications, 1998-2005)

Turning these insights into ‘branding structure’ was a central positioning activity during this time, the former head of corporate communications revealed. ‘Pioneering spirit’, ‘technology and innovation’, and ‘being at home everywhere’ were selected as the three legs the brand should stand on. Yet, Edlund mentioned a “centrifugal force

in ABB that everybody in business units tried to position themselves at the edges of the center of the brand, rather than in the middle”. These actions emphasized difference, not integration. The following quotation illustrates this challenge:

Rather than leaning towards the mother brand, they all tried to position themselves on the periphery and I kept saying ‘this is no good’. Then we invented a thing we called ‘the rule of two’, which basically [means] you can only get value from the ABB brand if you add value back to the ABB brand. [...] So we constructed a very simple kind of branding schematic that worked all way down to ‘how do you actually put together business stories about products’ and ‘what are the marketing messages that you need to support the core brand proposition and where will you get support yourself’. (Head of Corporate Communications, 1998-2005)

Edlund explained that brand strategy was a way of creating space for the business while creating value for ABB. He remembers that his communications team had a less-deep penetration into the business when he started the job in Corporate Communications; however, “when the crisis became more acute”, his team became better integrated into ABB’s business discussions. Additionally, the CEO “became much more directly involved in making sure that the companies, or divisions, not only meet their targets, but are doing the right things strategically to position themselves better for the future”. The following quotation illustrates the journey of company priorities:

[The brand function] was more like the outside veneer, you know, putting lacquer on something and it becomes nice and shiny. After a little while we got more integrated into the business and I could understand much better what was driving the business. When the corporate strategy became so clear about focusing on the core business, divesting the non-core businesses, settling these longstanding asbestos issues and the financial situation and so on, then of course it became deeper and more integrated. From the beginning, I always tried to reflect the priorities of the CEO in my work; it can’t be the other way around. [...] So I guess that mirrors also the journey of ABB and the CEO’s own understanding of their role. What they were doing with the company became a lot clearer. (Head of Corporate Communications, 1998-2005)

Edlund highlights that this process was dealt with over time and in parallel to re-working the mission and values. When Dormann resigned and Fred Kindle stepped in as the new CEO in 2005, Kindle and Edlund finalized the branding and repositioning exercise. Kindle, along with the executive committee, worked with mission, vision, and values. During a workshop with the group-management council, Edlund contributed to the process of finding an appropriate ABB tagline, indicated by his words:

We had an offsite, where we looked at various things and spent an entire afternoon basically brainstorming about the main elements that would constitute a statement, a nice tagline. We worked back and forth and it was good fun to begin with and in the end I collected their [80 top managers'] one-sentence [tagline ideas]. I went back to our office in Oerlikon that night and wrote the line: *Power and Productivity for a Better World*. And we trademarked it and I am very happy that they kept it, because it's a powerful statement and it came out of this branding process. (Head of Corporate Communications, 1998-2005)

Edlund provided further insight regarding how the communications team worked with branding during his time. He referred to "an unusual way" of dealing with this issue because, since there are normally agencies involved:

We worked for a little while with an agency [...] in London, but that was more to get sort of a structure, what are the elements to look at. But then ABB is such an independent company, which makes it difficult for consultants to even get traction there. So I decided that we should do it on our own. [...] The former head of branding and I worked together, and she always did the execution in terms of what would advertising look like, how do we manifest this, are there changes in corporate identity and how we use script and so on. (Head of Corporate Communications, 1998-2005)

Edlund outlined that the business eventually survived and started to thrive again, having progressed from the 'unwieldy situation' that existed when he joined in 1998. He mentioned that non-core businesses were sold in order to focus on the core propositions: 'power' for the power technology division, and 'productivity' for the automation division:

[During this] process, the business got re-focused while working with the brand in conjunction with the business at the same time. (Head of Corporate Communications, 1998-2005)

When Edlund worked with positioning, it entailed looking at ABB's 'competitive universe'. He reasoned that companies that have the same customers as ABB were its competitors:

Customers want to know, 'do you have the technology and innovation that we need', 'are you able to take all these big projects and to complete them on time', and 'do you understand what it takes to complete big projects in different parts of the world; are you a good local citizen, globally'? So, if you think of Siemens and General Electric, they are obviously huge, bigger, and also broader than ABB. General Electric makes anything from jet engines to dishwashers and a lot of stuff in-between. So what we tried to do is to position ourselves as big and as credible as those two and more innovative than Siemens perhaps, and less 'American' than General Electric. (Head of Corporate Communications, 1998-2005)

Edlund highlighted that positioning and communication are highly related, although decisions on how to be positioned come first. His metaphorical use of landscape illustrates his understanding:



You have to say, what's your hill, what's the view from there, what other hills are your competitors. Communication starts from making sure that you use this input to create a narrative to position yourself and to express your positioning in a way that is advantageous to the company [...] Positioning is almost like finding your directions with a compass and a map. The positioning is the point where you stop and [ask] 'where am I now', 'how far have I travelled', 'what's the distance to my next milestone', and 'how do I get there'. Then the communication is the next step to get to the next place. Sometimes your positioning is OK, the compass direction is fine, and we just continue. Or we need to emphasize more of this and more of that. This could be because of changes in the outside world. (Head of Corporate Communications, 1998-2005)

Edlund mentioned his belief that image and perception studies were commissioned much too scarcely during his time in ABB. Nevertheless, he maintained that obtaining feedback from the businesses vis-à-vis positioning or the usefulness of advertising was part of the process. As for actors, he made reference to a few people in the communication group being involved in positioning exercises:

We gathered the data with all sorts of ways through agencies and others, consultants who worked for us, but it would involve a small team in [the branding department] and myself and the senior communications people in the departments, because the communications heads in the divisions reported to me, obviously, and they were part of my small leadership team and then we set together with them, a handful of communicators. If we needed to make any changes, we would have taken it to the executive committee. (Head of Corporate Communications, 1998-2005)

### ***Brand Positioning Outcomes***

A major outcome of this crisis-based repositioning episode was a streamlined divisional structure focused on two main business fields: power technologies and automation technologies. Moreover, a broader and more multifaceted understanding of 'brand', including behavioral, cultural, and value aspects besides commercial and visual aspects, can be regarded as an important development for the brand and its position. The weekly CEO letters for strategic internal communication were both an important linguistic outcome during this episode and an important tool to ask for understanding among ABB staff regarding change initiatives. Updated mission and vision statements, as well as a new tagline (which ABB still uses today: Power and Productivity for a Better World) were other important strategy document and linguistic outcomes. A newly-created corporate brand communication schematic, to be customized for business units and their storytelling, was an additional novelty when repositioning ABB. As for structural changes, a better and deeper integration of brand-related issues in corporate strategy discussions could be considered an outcome of this second positioning episode. Finally, the corporation's brand comprehension of the ABB brand was now based on culture, value, and identity-centric pillars.

## *Brand Positioning Challenges*

Safeguarding and focusing the ABB brand in turbulent times can be assessed as the most difficult challenge in this case. Finding the time and resources to reposition a brand at a time when the very existence of the company is in peril is difficult, as this episode has shown. A critical challenge in bringing businesses closer to the ABB core in their positioning efforts, and at the same time creating space for the business, was to overcome what has been referred to as a ‘centrifugal force’; that is, business units trying to position themselves at the edges of the center of the corporate brand, rather than in the middle.

Table 8 summarizes empirical findings during episode two at corporate level.

### **Table 8**

Summary of empirical findings during episode two

Drivers	Action	Outcomes	Challenges
- Company crisis including bankruptcy threat	- Reactive crisis and change management	- Streamlined divisional structure	- Saving the brand during crisis situation
- Succeeding CEO (Dormann) with expanded responsibility	- Focusing company on core strengths (power and automation technologies)	- Broadened understanding of ‘brand’ (behavior, culture, value)	- Bringing BUs closer to brand core
- Non-core business divestments	- Internally searching for distinct culture characteristics to create a stronger ‘one company’ spirit	- Weekly letters for strategic internal communication	- Creating space for BUs while simultaneously creating value for corporate brand
- Power and automation technologies focus	- Composing weekly CEO letters initiating conversations with employees	- New mission and vision statements	- Dealing with business units not conforming with corporate brand guidelines
- New CEO once crisis was overcome	- Creating ‘the rule of two’ to bring BUs closer to the mother brand	- New brand structure and communication schematic for BUs	
	- Turning corporate strategy changes into a branding structure	- New tagline (Power and Productivity for a Better World)	
	- Starting deeper conversations between executives and communication team	- Deeper integrated brand and corporate strategy discussions	
	- Collaborating with external brand consultants to get structural input		
	- Conducting executive management workshop to discuss mission and vision		
	- Conducting global management workshop to find tagline summarizing brand position		

## Business Stabilization and Repositioning (2007–2013)

The process of working with the ABB brand in conjunction with the corporate strategy did not stop when Edlund left the company. Clarissa Haller, who succeeded Edlund in 2006 as head of corporate communications, started with the mission to further “develop and promote ABB’s strong brand world-wide” (ABB Press Release, 2006). Haller referred to positioning as being part of the ABB brand-building work:

We used positioning extensively when we built the corporate brand, but positioning is something you should not change every two or three years. Of course, you have to revisit the positioning from time to time. [...] The branding is, in that case, really the positioning. [...] So what makes us specific and what is our personality? I think it worked well. Also, the stakeholders can actually feel this specific positioning and also what differentiates us from our competitors. But if you give ‘this impression’ and ‘this promise’, of course you have to deliver on it. Otherwise, you’ve got a problem. (Head of Corporate Communications, 2005-2014)

In 2007, ABB hired Maria Jobin to lead a global repositioning process in her role as head of global branding. Jobin emphasized a high interrelation of positioning with the concepts of vision and differentiation. Positioning is also referred to as the strategic direction regarding both business and brand strategies. Positioning needs to be broadly discussed, but at the same time nuanced, as diverse and multiple stakeholders need to be satisfied with a convincing story:

We define positioning as the strategic direction that we want to give to ABB, and of course positioning a brand is a long-term strategic vision. Branding follows the company strategy and then you need to have a vision for ABB, what is the ultimate reason to be for ABB, why we are here and why ABB exists at all, what is our mission independent of doing business and make money; how we want to do the business in a different way than our competitors. [...]

Basically the positioning is all about defining who you want to be and with the communication you start to communicate the messages and the way to get there. Actually the positioning is the vision a company has for its brand, and with the communication and other tools, you start building blocks to achieve this positioning. (Jobin, Head of Global Branding)

Constant internal communication was the enabler for achieving the intended position for ABB: “This is kind of the way to achieve the position that we would like to have for ABB”, Jobin explains.

## *Brand Positioning Drivers*

Haller believes that brand and corporate strategy must be closely linked in order to work; “otherwise, the branding culture would be extremely artificial and people wouldn’t be behind it”. Lagerholm added that the business needs to be seen as ‘the leader’, while the brand “is used to move business forward”. Haller explains that initially, it was very important to focus on educating in regard to brand value before starting a long brand repositioning project. Even though “the well-known and the renowned B2B companies have always taken care of their brands”, she found that further improvements needed to be made to the ABB brand:

What we found was actually a very fragmented world in terms of design, which is only one part of the branding, but, of course, it is an obvious one. I would really tend to say there was a logo and that was it. The visual guidelines were extremely open for interpretation. [...] It was obvious that there were a lot of overlaps and that people were re-inventing the wheel. A strong brand identity, strong positioning, strong expression of the positioning, and strong communication of brand activity towards the outside market would have been very beneficial for ABB. [...] It was obvious that this company deserves something that really expresses all the energy and expertise. This had to be bundled and re-focused, because the brand gives a lot to the people in the company. If you have a strong brand, people can get inspired. (Head of Corporate Communications, 2005-2014)

Jobin described her work at ABB as a different than her previous brand management experiences. The following quotation illustrates her impression of the ABB brand at the time she joined the company:

The look and feel and what ABB stands for was not really defined. There were some values and some visual identity guidelines, but there was no brand story, and the look and feel was very much like in the ‘80s. We did some market research to see how other companies in the industry presented themselves and the result was appalling, basically a very similar way of communicating, a bit of an old-fashioned look, no clear imagery concept and also very conservative communication style. Branding here was really all about the logo, in terms of ‘we have the logo and that is enough’. We had to do quite a bit of training and learning by doing with the colleagues. It was also about creating the awareness that the brand can be used in a much stronger way to support the business. Also, in B2B, the brand is a very important asset that can be put to work even harder to support the business and the bottom line. (Head of Global Branding)

The global brand director highlighted both an internal and an external perspective of how the change process was started. On the one hand, Jobin highlighted the mandate coming from the top management; that is, executives noticing and discussing that more could be done with the brand. The awareness and support from senior management to start this project was essential, as indicated by the following quotation:

Internally, people already noticed that more had to be done. [...] ABB [organizations] in the countries and businesses are very far away from the corporate center in Zurich and were integrating their own approach interpretations to communications and to the brand. So the only thing really in common in the communication materials was the logo. The rest looked completely different from country to country or from business to business: the material, the tonality, and the wording that was used. It was a completely different story. At some point, the executive committee noticed this as well, and they decided to do something. (Head of Global Branding)

On the other hand, she referred to an ABB image that needed to be refreshed, following the assessment of ABB and other competitor presentations in various customer touchpoints such as tradeshow:

We really had a conservative and old-fashioned look and feel. We were actually presenting new leading technology in an old technology look. I also visited competitor stands and many of them had the same old industry touch and conservativeness, but some of them also started to stand out, perhaps not very thorough and systematic, but here were some good examples about what could be done. (Head of Global Branding)

### ***Brand Positioning Action***

Initiating the repositioning of ABB in 2007 meant developing, streamlining, and professionalizing brand management activities, as respondents revealed. ABB's core branding team consisted of only five people, while initially, when Jobin started, only two employees formed the brand management team. The head of global branding explained that ABB chose to work with some external consultants, as part of the branding and positioning exercise:

We outsource some activities and a few agencies are working for us, as we are a very small team in branding. We have one strategic agency with whom we developed the whole repositioning and the visual identity. It is a global agency specialized in strategic branding. We also have one agency for the advertising campaign development and a media-buying agency. There are also some freelance designers that work for us very often, creating material for us. They know the brand very well and work closely, almost exclusively, with us. (Head of Global Branding)

Haller gave further details into the choices of how the brand development was operationalized as well as what were the roles of various actors. The following quotation reveals the dynamics of partnering with a global brand consultancy.

We had a pitch with several agencies and picked *Interbrand*. It was a very good and professional partner to do this and they did a fantastic job. But I would really like to outline Maria's [Jobin] role [...] to translate ABB or to explain it to the agency. It was not that the agency developed something and gave it back to us; it was really Maria who guided the agency. You hire an agency because sometimes you want crazy ideas, but you also have to understand that some ideas are just crazy and nothing you really need. Maria was really fantastic in balancing creativity and what makes sense for ABB from a branding point of view. (Head of Corporate Communications, 2005-2014)

Another important choice, regarding how to diffuse brand knowledge within the decentralized ABB organization, was the deployment of 'brand champions'; that is, regional brand responsables. Each of the eight ABB regions has at least two or three brand responsables, as Jobin explained:

I trained them [regional brand responsables]; they came here for an assignment of three months. All of them were here with us in Zurich for three months to make sure that they really understand the brand and can assume the regional responsibility. In principle, they are now able to solve at least 80 percent of the branding issues locally. For the more difficult issues we have a monthly conference call – the branding council – where we discuss and solve all of them. (Head of Global Branding)

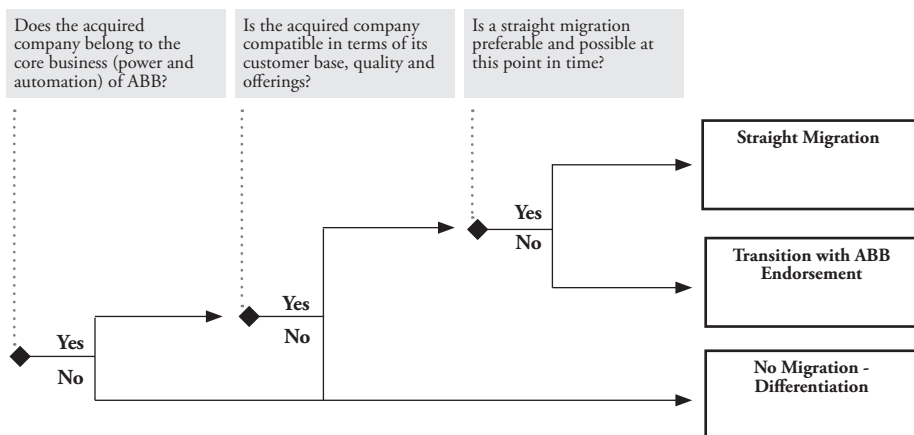
Haller provided further insights into the global brand responsables' need to diffuse the new ABB branding elements around the world as ambassadors. The following quotation emphasizes this task-force's network character and the role culture plays in this endeavor:

These are people who are regularly trained, and we have a close network with them that they can answer questions within their area. I think you need certain flexibility; you can't put everything in rules and guidelines. A company is a living body and you will always have a specific cultural element. The US, for example, will always be different to some extent from Asia, and Europe will be different from Africa. So you need to acquire a certain sensitivity; then, you really understand the heart of the brand, the heart of the positioning, and detecting where the boundaries are blurring and where you have some room for interpretation. We count on these people then to interpret the brand in the right way for the different cultures. (Head of Corporate Communications, 2005-2014)

Retaining the historical one-company/one-brand strategy ('One ABB') can be seen as a challenge that influences the positioning process. Even with a mother brand strategy in place, there are strategic or tactical choices for daughter brands, as explained by Lagerholm. As an example, she mentioned the recent acquisition of Baldor Electric Company (a former competitor in the automation product area) in the US:

We were a one-brand company before. This changed during the last couple of years. Now we are taking more care of the respective cultures, and it's not only about using the ABB logotype. Here, the integration strategy is to say 'A Company within ABB'. This means to apply some kind of daughter brand strategy in the overall ABB mother brand strategy. (Lagerholm, Head of Communications, Sweden)

Figure 16 illustrates ABB's three-layer brand architecture and strategy. After acquiring a new company, one option would be a straight ABB migration. The tactical question reads: Is a straight migration preferable and possible at this point in time? Another option would be a transition with ABB's endorsement (as in the case of Baldor); here, the question is: Is the acquired company compatible in terms of its customer base, quality, and offerings? The final option is no migration (differentiation), and is supposed to be selected if the acquired company does not belong to the core business (power and automation) of ABB (Heidig, Tomczak, & Jobin, 2013).



**Figure 16**

ABB brand architecture illustration (Heidig, Tomczak, & Jobin, 2013)

The following quotation illustrates the complexity of the complete rebranding that took place in 2007, by describing the process of getting from a current position to an intended position, as well as revealing the involvement of many stakeholders and organizational diversity.

All the analysis work, including reviewing competitors' positionings, our own brand perception in the market, possible positioning scenarios for ABB, and so on, this triggered a very broad discussion with our internal stakeholders across countries and businesses. ABB is a big company with a very diverse portfolio, from very small products to huge infrastructure projects. [...] Being so big and diverse, it has been quite an exercise to bring everyone on the same page and create an umbrella positioning that everyone feels they belong to and feel good with. (Head of Global Branding)

Using the expression 'umbrella' underlines the importance of organizational belonging and also suggests protection once a common ground is found. Finding this common ground was an important initial step in repositioning a highly decentralized

and diverse corporation. However, creating brand awareness internally was not new for ABB: since the founding of the company after the ASEA and Brown Boveri merger, there was a need to create brand awareness both internally and externally, as stressed by ABB's founding CEO, Barnevik. However, specific positioning and repositioning episodes, such as the most recent one, required time-consuming discussions and workshops on international levels, as respondents revealed. ABB employees were further involved in repositioning activities via the 'brand days', in which the brand management team organized presentations and workshops to explain the brand, the position, and values. To make sure that the organization understood how to work with the new tools, the workshops also included many hands-on and practical exercises:

People in Western countries had a better knowledge of branding in general; how to apply the branding rules, and how to leverage on the brand for the business. But we had many colleagues from other regions having little knowledge about brand strategy and branding. So bringing everyone to a similar level of knowledge involved quite a lot of travelling, many presentations, discussions, and workshops. It took quite some time to create the awareness and develop the understanding internally. [...] After that and with the help of the senior management, it was much easier. (Head of Global Branding)

Jobin further explained that when an offering is too complex and difficult to understand for the general public, "all you have is the brand and the trust that people have in it". Nonetheless, the challenge was to first make this understanding internally grounded in the highly decentralized ABB organization. Haller assessed the CEO's involvement in the project as extremely important, especially in cases of resistance to change or downplaying brand importance:

The CEO [Joe Hogan] absolutely understands the value of the brand and [...] he was absolutely behind that. When some people [...] in some businesses felt, 'oh, come on, that's not so important', it was really essential to have his backing and his strong statement that he thinks this is extremely important, that we need this and that, and that we want this for ABB. (Head of Corporate Communications, 2005-2014)

Jobin also highlighted the relevance of the relationship between successful brand positioning and employees in triggering CEO involvement:

In the very beginning, it was a little bit like, 'it will be done by corporate communication and that's fine'. But for us it was very clear from the beginning that we needed to involve many more people than communications, because we know that the brand lives from the people inside. We also thought that we would present some proposals to the executive committee and eventually get an approval there, and we could then start implementing. (Head of Global Branding)

Showing the CEO and executive committee the importance of the repositioning project was referred to as an important step in the process. Jobin explained that after an initial presentation and a follow-up session, the executive committee "got really involved", asking for a progress report to be delivered every month. Once the



executive committee was involved, the project appeared to have the proper support. However, Jobin mentioned that the biggest challenge was to get a very decentralized corporation aligned. As long as the independent profit centers delivered to the bottom line of the ABB mother brand, the subsidiaries were substantially in their operative approach. This mindset, grounded in the organization from its founding days, was still very strong, as Jobin explained. The corporate structure's entrepreneurial characteristics, stressed since Barnevik's leadership, are described on the one hand from a commercial point of view, and on the other hand from a cultural diversity perspective. These characteristics are described as a big asset, but at the same time, as a serious challenge in finding a common corporation positioning ground:

This organization is very entrepreneurial. This is good, because locally we are very quick with the reaction times compared to other competitors that are more hierarchical and slower in the decision-making. On the other side, we are extremely diverse. We are not only present in 100 countries, but we are very local, we are Chinese in China and Indians in India. [...] All this cultural diversity makes it very challenging to get a common understanding of what the brand is, what it should stand for, and how this can help the business. (Head of Global Branding)

The following quotation illustrates the difficulties of the ABB's repositioning work:

[ABB is] like a big cruiser ship: hard to move in one direction, but once you get it in that direction, it's very powerful, then all the energy is focused and this is crucial for the success of such a project. It takes time, needs a lot of internal buy-in, a lot of discussion, and at times some compromises. [...] Branding is emotional, is something that everyone feels to understand [...] and has an opinion about, and you need to be able to listen. That was really the challenge, but on the other hand, once people say 'OK, I understand what you say', when you have the commitment, then it's really powerful. (Head of Global Branding)

The ABB repositioning project was described as "a long journey". During the brand analysis stage, questions like 'Who are we?' and 'What do we stand for?' were posed, emphasizing the core of the ABB brand identity. Mapping the brand situation globally, analyzing all brand elements and touch points across countries and businesses, and analyzing the brand environment were major activities when starting the positioning project. The next phase sought to answer the questions of 'Where do we want to be?' and 'How do we get there?' The corresponding activities, such as defining the ABB brand values, themes, and position, and developing a compelling brand story built on the corporate strategy, were carried out. Subsequent to this, the gained insights needed to be translated into visual appearance; the tasks included creating a fresh look and feel with a new and differentiating design framework, defining detailed guidelines and branding tools, and creating an implementation plan combined with setting priorities. Finally, a brand tracking and audit system needed to be developed and implemented to monitor performance and to continuously steer the brand (ABB – Bringing A Brand To Life, 2012, unpublished internal document).

### *Brand Analysis Activities*

Numerous customer touch points were examined during the brand analysis phase, including institutional (for example, stationary, signage, architecture, vehicles, products, apparel, electronic media) and promotional (for example, internal and external publications, advertising, multimedia, engagement, trade shows) brand touch points. Furthermore, several reports based on advertising effectiveness analysis as well as customer and employee surveys were analyzed in order to establish an ABB brand perception map (ABB – Bringing A Brand To Life, 2012, unpublished internal document). “We wanted ABB to appear as a modern company” and be positioned accordingly, the head of global branding stressed. In the following quotation, Jobin refers to positioning as ‘mapping the territory’ when elaborating upon the brand analysis phase:

With a lot of brand and market research – 30 market studies were analyzed – and many interviews we defined the current brand territory of ABB related to the brand territories of our competitors. (Head of Global Branding)

In the process of this exercise, analogies were drawn between country images and territories, to find the specific position of the brand in relation to the competition and to discover attributes and attribute overlaps:

In the same way that each country has its own territory and people also have a perception of this country, a brand has also its own territory of attributes and perception among the stakeholders. So the exercise was to figure out and define this territory for the ABB brand in relation to the territories of our competitors. (Head of Global Branding)

Only global competitors were chosen for this analysis phase, as it was not possible to go “very, very local”, ABB’s global head of branding explained. The following quotation illustrates that this brand analysis phase was kept as simple as possible:

We have a few major competitors globally and we compared with them. And all the local ones, you have to ignore them at this level of analysis. We do localize in the implementation, but not too much at the high strategic level because then you will never get it done. You need to really focus on the big players. (Head of Global Branding)

Jobin explained that for the local competitors (for example, in China), the responsibility for such an analysis lies within the local communication and branding team; that is, implementation is performed in a more operational manner. On the other hand, the branding team in ABB’s Zurich headquarters trains regional ‘brand responsables’, as highlighted earlier. Jobin further explained that there are some competition attribute overlaps, but the goal is to focus on the specific attributes that are ‘owned’ by the company:

When the current map situation was clear, we started to think about other possible brand territory scenarios in that map. We asked ourselves ‘where do we want to be in the next ten years, and which attributes do we want to be related to or known for’, and we started developing. There are now a few attributes that we clearly own, that we are known for; for example, ‘leading edge technology’. The research showed us that ABB is considered as ‘leading edge technology’ and a ‘multicultural’ company. It is also perceived as ‘local’, and this is very important for some of our customers. (Head of Global Branding)

Based on the brand analysis activities, a positioning map with five possible scenarios was developed. These scenarios were elaborated and evaluated during a global communication workshop involving many participants from all businesses and regions. Pros and cons for each scenario were largely discussed and assessed, and three favorite scenarios were chosen for customer verification (ABB – Bringing A Brand To Life, 2012, unpublished internal document).

Jobin stressed that the exercise of finding a common ground for a new positioning strategy took nearly one year. She described the phase one of the repositioning process as agreeing on “the strategic content of the brand, the core, what we stand for and what we want to be”. In the second phase, the brand strategy needed to be translated into an appropriate visual identity. This additional exercise was described as a discussion that was planned to be “as rational as possible”, though it turned out to be “very emotional”, Jobin recalled. The attributes ABB ‘owns’ and is known for are described as the foundation for future branding initiatives in terms of communicated position and brand themes:

We took the attributes currently owned by the brand and said ‘Now, this is our basis, this is the foundation on which we are going to build, but we want to extend our perception to other attributes that we want to be related to in the future, and we should start building this up now’. So in the map, we moved ABB from the current territory a little bit into the direction that we think will make us more different from competitors, and at the same time gives ABB a clearer image internally and for the outside world. After agreeing on the positioning, we defined it in words. (Head of Global Branding)

### *Brand Platform Creation*

During this phase, the strategic basis was laid for the future (intended) position of the ABB brand. The ‘brand platform’, described as the core, contains the elements ‘brand positioning’, ‘communications themes’, and ‘brand values’. The first layer around the core, named ‘brand elements’, comprises name, logo, colors, typography, imagery, language, and structures. The second layer, named ‘brand experience’, contains design, communication, behavior, and touch points. The surrounding environment for these three brand platform parts covers customers, markets, investors, society, and other external stakeholders. The ABB brand platform comprises several documents that are made accessible to employees via intranet.

## Brand position statement and brand story

One of the written repositioning process outcomes is the brand positioning paper, a four-page document describing the role of a brand, the meaning of positioning ABB, and the ABB brand by means of a story. The brand positioning paper states that positioning ABB means “emphasizing the distinctive characteristics that already exist”, making the brand “different from competitors”, and ensuring that it “appeals to the public”. ABB’s use of the positioning term is related to identity (“distinctive characteristics that already exist”), differentiation (“making us different from competition”), and image, as well as reputation to target groups and to society at large (“appeal to the public”). Moreover, ABB understands the idea of positioning as one of storytelling. In order to be memorable, “the story supporting the ABB brand needs to be compelling and used consistently across all channels of communication with stakeholders”. Moreover, internal brand policies highlight positioning as ‘the golden thread’ (ABB Brand Positioning Paper, unpublished internal document). The following definition illustrates this point:

The brand positioning is the golden thread that runs through everything we do and inspires our choices and guides our decisions. Everything ABB does, including future products and services, should support these goals. (ABB Brand Positioning Paper, unpublished internal document)

The idea of positioning as storytelling is further emphasized with an ABB brand story document, entitled “Efficient Solutions for a Dynamic World”. The document explains the need for ABB’s existence, its vision, and its mission. This description of a fast-paced and competitive world highlights that business success depends on achieving productivity, efficiency, quality, reliability, and speed. Explanations of how ABB has achieved these objectives “for more than a century” precede examples of ABB’s core business areas and expertise, as well as sustainability and ethical aspects of the brand’s intended position (ABB Brand Story, unpublished internal document). One exemplary paragraph taken from the brand story reads as follows:

Whether our customers want a household switch or help running vast industrial plants and regional power networks, their first thought and highest priority is the reliability of their power and processes. ABB is the company they turn to for both. We tailor solutions that meet the needs of our customers and society, helping every part of the world and every sector of the economy make the most effective use of the electricity they need. In this way, we are helping change the world and raising living standards for millions of people. To be truly excellent, the quality of our products and systems must be matched by the quality of our ethical standards, of our dedication to the communities where we operate, and of our commitment to offering challenging careers to our employees. Whether developing new technologies or negotiating contracts, everything we do is governed by the principles of responsibility, respect and determination, to ensure the sustainability of the company’s success. (ABB Brand Story, unpublished internal document)

## Updated brand values

Before the repositioning project (and also as an outcome of the previous brand repositioning exercise following ABB's crisis), the ABB brand values were represented by 'leading-edge technology', 'pioneering spirit', and 'at home everywhere' (Rebuilding ABB, 2005, unpublished internal document). The new ABB brand platform very much builds on these values, now utilizing the following three brand value pillars: 'Leading-edge technology – An innovative player. Strong.>'; 'Inclusive – A multicultural network. Diverse.>'; and 'Passionate – A committed team. Dynamic.' (ABB Brand Values, unpublished internal document). The meaning of each brand value is further explained in the table below (Table 9).

**Table 9**

ABB Brand Values (unpublished internal document)

Leading-edge technology	Inclusive	Passionate
ABB is a synonym for sophisticated technology. Based on skilled, long-term experience and built on a healthy entrepreneurial foundation, we are trusted to deliver reliable and powerful performance – through our clients to the modern world. The ABB brand is technology-driven, systematic, precise and strong.	ABB is at home everywhere. We act as a global family, strongly relying on each other and inspired by our diversity. Our successful worldwide presence is based on our spirit of openness, tolerance and inclusiveness – and on our ability to orchestrate our multi-cultural network. The ABB brand is open, respectful and multi-cultural.	ABB is driven by passion and commitment. We never give up, and we are determined to inspire our customers as well as our employees. ABB is a cradle for innovation. We continuously strengthen our reputation as an attractive global player that is full of ideas and driven by the pioneering spirit that has been its hallmark from the start. The ABB brand is commitment-driven, inventive and forward-looking.

## Communication themes

The brand platform stands for a messaging framework that is guiding communication with themes and values, which should “always shine through” (ABB Brand Platform, unpublished internal document). The following quotation illustrates how messages and themes were developed on the basis of being able to communicate consistently throughout the organization:

We developed a structure for communicating the brand and how to do that. Then we said ‘these are our brand values, this is our positioning and this is the way we are going to achieve that’. And all these elements were used for the development of the visual [identity]. (Head of Global Branding)

Communication themes are advised to always refer to the overall brand story, “Efficient Solutions for a Dynamic World”. They consist of several possible combinations in a two-dimensional space, something that Edlund, during his time as head of corporate communications referred to as ‘the rule of two’ for combining a

common theme of ‘One ABB’ and a specific market offering. Similarly, in the newly developed frame, one axis comprises the options of ‘energy efficiency’, ‘grid reliability’, and ‘industrial productivity’ (that is, key business themes), while the other axis offers the options ‘leading-edge technology’, ‘inclusive’, and ‘passionate’ (that is, brand values). An exemplary communication theme combining the business theme ‘industrial productivity’ and the brand value ‘leading-edge technology’ reads: “Application expertise to bring reliability and efficiency to complex industrial processes” (ABB Brand Platform, unpublished internal document).

### *Brand Visual Identity Creation*

During this phase, the brand platform elements were translated into visual appearance. Jobin explained that a visual identity was needed; one that could translate and “reflect the positioning and how the company differentiates itself from the rest of the competitors”. The main communication themes include energy efficiency, grid reliability, industrial productivity, and lower environmental impact. Additional themes cover customer partnership, innovation and quality, and, as taglines, “world’s leading engineering company” and “global attractive employer”. Then, six ABB visual identity essentials were derived from the intended brand position and values. These included accentuating ABB as the ‘one brand’, use of colors and typeface, or an imagery language reflecting the ABB brand values (ABB Brand Identity Imagery Guidelines, unpublished internal document).

Updating the Visual Identity Database was seen as important because “identity represents consistent standards of quality and therefore encourages customer loyalty” and “gives confidence in the brand”. Visual product design is described as improving “brand image and visibility” in order to “stand out in a highly aggressive market”. ABB product values are described as “one sustainable global family of quality products, clean and simple, functional and efficient, innovative and integrated, and humanistic and clear”. Specific design guidelines, in process automation business units, for instance, deal with issues surrounding logo, product branding, color, design features, software, controls and displays, packaging and labels, and rating plates (ABB Visual Product Design Guidelines, unpublished internal document).

### *Brand Position Implementation*

The first external implementation activity of ABB’s repositioning strategy started in January of 2009. Jobin referred to ABB’s presence at an important industry trade fair as a “game-changer” for establishing and strengthening a new brand mindset throughout the organization. ABB Germany was selected to implement the newly developed brand position at the Hanover Industry Fair. The following quotation illustrates the internal importance of this external event:

In our business, the most visible touch points are the trade shows and Hanover, Germany, is the biggest industry fair worldwide. [...] Hanover was very important for us and we really made sure that it was a state-of-the-art implementation of the branding, and it was. That was in 2009 and it was the game-changer for us. After Hanover, everyone was on board. After Hanover, all the ‘I don’t likes’ disappeared – it was like magic – because then everyone really understood what we meant and why branding is important, why we needed to have a very disciplined and systematic approach and why this makes a big difference. (Head of Global Branding)

Haller also highlighted the Hanover Industry Fair, where ABB presented its brand with a newly designed booth and translated positioning guidelines. The following quotation further illustrates the importance of receiving positive feedback from ABB employees worldwide:

They were grateful and felt proud that ABB for the first time had a booth, which was transporting how they felt about their brand and their product and what they were actually doing. And I think this is a good sign, that people feel that it really resonates to what they are doing and it expresses their day-to-day work to some extent. (Head of Corporate Communications, 2005-2014)

The following quotation explains that due to the financial crisis and budget reductions, the further external implementation happened under constrained conditions:

[At the] end of 2010 we finished the implementation in the traditional media. It took two full years. We started the implementation in the middle of the recession and we didn’t get any additional budget to do the implementation. Therefore, we had to be very pragmatic, saying ‘we will implement the new look and feel only for the new product-launches and new materials that need to be produced. All the rest will only change as the shelves are empty’. (Head of Global Branding)

The current and ongoing phase can be described as applying the repositioning strategy “in all digital channels”. Jobin described this as a “big project” due to countless ABB web pages, as well as mobile devices, which need “special care”. Haller referred to this final digitalization process as one of the bigger repositioning challenges:

Digitalization was a challenge [...] you get different communication and customer needs and we had to translate the brand in another dimension, in the digital world. We had to define how do we want to present ABB on these channels. You really have to make a distinction between what are your own channels on the one hand side but also how do you want to position ABB on social media channels. [...] We are in the process of renewing and completing our web presence. (Head of Corporate Communications, 2005-2014)

Wrapping up the ABB repositioning process during the last couple of years, Haller highlighted the importance of discipline in building the ABB brand over time in a decentralized organization. The following quotation illustrates the importance of achieving internal acceptance of a branding rationale:

In these five years, I have seen quite some evolution, also in our competitors. I saw that some of the competitors were also updating their branding; I guess it was a kind of a wake up for some of them to do more than they did in the past. Branding is very important, not only in B2C, but also in B2B because of the globalization and emerging brands from developing markets. It's an important differentiator. (Head of Global Branding)

Jobin explained that a brand “gives long-term, more sustainable perception”; while products can be quickly copied, a brand cannot be copied because it has its own personality. This understanding has been very clear in B2C, but less so in B2B:

Even when I joined [ABB], the colleagues in the business said ‘our customers know our products and they are good and we are confident with them’, and I would say ‘yes, but how long can you keep the advantage this product gives you?’ This is now more and more [established], people are more aware of this. You need to keep innovating all the time as the period between launching a new product and a similar one coming out in the market is always smaller. [...]. (Head of Global Branding)

### ***Brand Positioning Outcomes***

A streamlined ABB brand perception can be regarded as a major outcome during the third discovered positioning episode. This followed from a systematic process that also produced updated or new strategy documents such as the various brand platform guidelines to assist ABB staff in achieving the intended position. ‘Owning’ brand attributes like ‘leading-edge technology’ is a major associative (cognitive) brand positioning and implementation outcome. Moreover, the Hanover Industry Fair of 2009, and its role as an initial brand repositioning launch event and game-changer, arranged for establishing a new brand-oriented mindset throughout the organization. Finally, this third episode can be described as being mostly inspired by a culture- and visual identity-centric brand comprehension.

### ***Brand Positioning Challenges***

Finding a brand position story that is convincing for all target audiences was a major challenge for ABB. While positioning the ABB brand needed to be distinct in order to differentiate, it also had to be integrative in order to appear likeable for ABB's diverse stakeholders. Getting the executive management team on board to support the project was challenging, but turned out to be an enabler of the repositioning episode's success once the strategy was fully supported. However, internally-grounding brand positioning strategy and changes in the highly decentralized and complex ABB organization proved to be challenging. Internal reluctance and resistance to change needed to be overcome, along with winning internal employee commitment and



support in steering ABB toward a commonly agreed direction. While doing this, avoiding brand dilution by too many compromises among internal stakeholders was also challenging. Nevertheless, ABB needed to keep the complexity level as low as possible; otherwise, it would be impossible to successfully communicate the brand. ABB also faced the challenge of balancing geographical brand knowledge differences in the position-finding process. The bundling of country, business, and product-level communication under one central brand position and communication concept also proved to be challenging.

Table 10 summarizes empirical findings during episode three at corporate level.

**Table 10**  
Summary of empirical findings during episode three

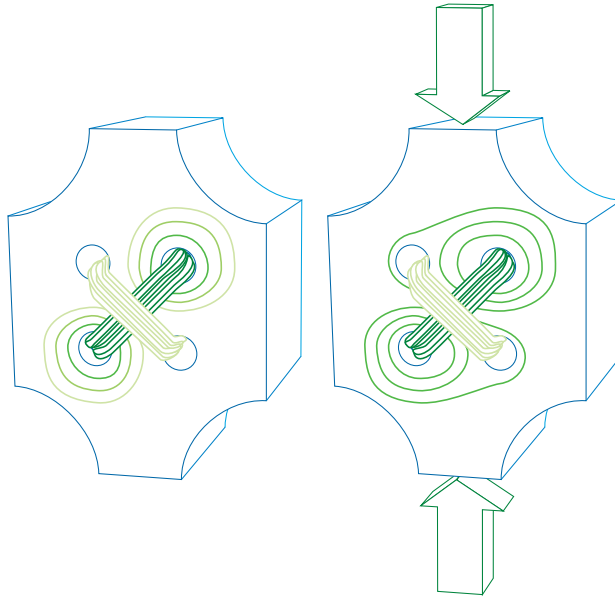
Drivers	Action	Outcomes	Challenges
- Executive committee brand rejuvenation proposal	- Convincing CEO and executive management with project plan	- Brand platform and policy documents	- Finding brand story that convinces many target audiences
- Newly hired global brand responsible for steering repositioning	- Collaborating with external brand consultants to structure process and creatively differentiate brand	- External event (Hanover Industry Fair) for further internal grounding of change	- Getting executive management on board as an enabler for project success
- Conservative and old-fashioned brand image	- Conducting various survey types internally and externally	- 'Owning' brand attributes (such as 'leading-edge technology')	- Internally grounding brand position changes despite decentralization
- Fragmented brand design and visual guidelines	- Analyzing competitors' brand positions and benchmarking on global scale	- Streamlined brand perception	- Overcoming reluctance and resistance to change
- Competitors' fractional brand advancements	- Agreeing on intended position scenarios and verifying options	- Culture and visual identity-centric brand comprehension	- Winning employee commitment and support
- Digital media developments	- Stressing importance of stories to position the brand		- Avoiding brand dilution by too many compromises among internal stakeholders
- Globalization and emerging markets developments	- Organizing global 'brand days' to inform about changes		- Keeping brand complexity level low yet distinct
- Global race for talents	- Educating regional brand responsables worldwide		- Dealing with geographical brand-knowledge differences
	- Allowing flexibility in local strategy execution due to cultural differences		- Creating an all-encompassing communication concept
	- Creating brand platform and policy to guide implementation		
	- Translating intended position in visual brand identity elements		
	- Developing brand values and communication themes		
	- Implementing intended position guidelines worldwide		

# Brand Positioning at Business Level

## *ABB Force Measurement*

The *Force Measurement* business unit (product group) is part of ABB's Process Automation Division, providing customers with products and solutions for instrumentation, automation, and industrial process optimization. Force Measurement supplies force and dimension measurement products in a wide variety of processes and industries (for example, measuring tension in the process of steelmaking). The unit's flagship brand is *Stressometer*, a "high performing flatness measurement and control system", and a "critical success factor for flat rolling mills" (Stressometer Product Brochure, published external document). The product family is described as making "the difference between winning and losing market shares", impacting "the bottom line result" and combining "the best strip flatness performance with the lowest life-cycle cost". Respondents referred to ABB Force Measurement products as constantly driving for "top-line"; "premium" products that are "solving problems that don't have a solution yet". Customers are looking for "references", "reputation", and ultimately "trust", considering the significant investment cost associated with Force Measurement products, like the Stressometer system and the considerable impact it has on the customers' respective mill output. To reach potential and existing customers, ABB Force Measurement has a worldwide sales presence. However, the unit's current challenge is assessing possibilities of also reaching the mid-segment, to increase market share. For some customers, products are over-specified, which means that they are not willing to pay the extra cost for benefits they don't necessarily need.

Informal conversations with Force Measurement respondents gave an impression of pride to work for, and be part of, ABB. By communicating that the offered products and solutions are cutting-edge and that leading market positions are owned worldwide, a sense of superiority becomes noticeable. However, this pride sometimes relates more to the heritage of the specific product area; that is, the *Pressductor* technology, a patented 1950s ASEA invention. Force Measurements' track record dates back to 1954, when the Pressductor technology was invented (a measurement principle based on the magnetoelastic effect; see Figure 17). Later, the unit developed products and applications based on this technology.



**Figure 17**

Illustration of the ABB Pressductor Technology

### ***Brand Positioning Drivers***

The intention of this second part of the ABB case study is to highlight how brand position drivers are referred to in the context of an ABB business-level perspective.

Martin Ottosson has been responsible for marketing communications of unit-specific products at Force Measurement for more than 10 years. He explains that occupying leading industry roles is a constant throughout ABB's businesses, and that their overriding goal is "to come up with an ABB brand". He describes this task as one of the most important things with which he and others in his role have to deal. Ottosson emphasized cross-fertilization when it comes to the relation between the ABB corporate brand and Force Measurement product brands:

We go to large steel plants [customers] normally, and they buy things from all of ABB: machines, motors, drives, etc. So in general, ABB has a very good reputation. So when they see those three red letters and it is connected to *Stressometer*, they say 'oh, ok, you are from ABB', because sometimes they don't know that, "oh, then you are good". So it has a very good positive thing for us, definitely. I think it is very important. Because they say 'the ABB system', they don't even know the name, but after a while they learn, because there are so many influences from other products in the ABB group, which is fantastic. (Ottosson, Market Communication Manager)

George Fodor, system development manager at the unit, illustrated the role of the brand as “keeping good advices”, adding that moving forward as a brand involves adjusting, but not compromising, core principles if they prove to be good:

You follow your road like a traveler, but you keep some rules while you travel, you move forward, but change your position, but still keep some principles. I am convinced they are good, but I critically analyze them. If they are good, I keep them. (Fodor, System Development Manager)

Peter Fixell, the product and market development manager, also mentioned this dynamic perspective on brand identity and its relation to brand position. He described his position as being “the manager for the product managers and also the R&D people”; regarding some of his duties, he noted the difficulty of “making sure that the very core values of the ABB brand [are] actually incorporated in the product”. Fixell was not sure about which is the stronger brand between ABB and Stressometer; in his opinion, there is a combination of strengths, as the following quotation reveals:

In that specific case [Stressometer technology brand], the brand is very strong. The anticipation from the customer from just knowing what they are buying makes them pay a good deal more than [buying from] the competitors. Because they are convinced to get something from it, both from just a mechanical calculation because there is money and also from their gut feeling that this is the right way of doing it. I mean, it’s a psychological decision also, whether they have the experience, what they are expecting and they will know that they will not be disappointed. (Fixell, Product & Market Development Manager)

Some respondents remember internal tensions between ABB corporate level and the Force Measurement product group. This is quite natural, as large organizations need to find a solid combination of the overall company branding (ABB) and the enormous number of products marketed (such as Stressometer). Essentially, the various products “have their own values and own life” under the umbrella of an ABB brand “that communicates solid understanding of customer needs and liability as well as presence all over the world”, as Fixell explained. This might cause tensions during times of (corporate level) strategic change initiatives. Around the turn of the millennium, the unit was requested to remove the brand name *Stressometer* in their communication due to a strategic shift toward becoming an industrial IT provider under Lindahl’s, and later Centerman’s, leadership (which ABB eventually refrained from). However, the product group product and communication managers resisted this enforced change, as they saw their product’s unique values and differentiators in peril. The following quotations illustrate how a planned corporate strategy change can cause discord between corporate and business levels:

We were supposed to come up with plans for [new] names that should be on the different products but I refused. [...] The head office in Zurich wanted us to remove the *Stressometer* name. But I said that this was not a good idea because ‘that’s what we are living on!’ (Market Communication Manager)

[Corporate level wanted] to have something streamlined for measuring products underneath 'ABB Measuring Systems' or 'Measure IT'. Everything should be categorized underneath. Then you actually ruin what is already built. [...] From a branding point of view we stood up, because our customers would be confused. They are asking for *Stressometer* and if we would say 'we don't have it, it's Measure IT but still the same', it wouldn't work. (Product & Market Development Manager)

In general, the unit's relationship with the ABB corporate brand can be described as somewhat ambiguous. At times, the importance and strength of ABB is highlighted (integration), while at other times a distant and independent thinking (differentiation) is emphasized:

The driver for our brand is quality and technology leadership. I mean, if you look at Stressometer and ABB, the customers will know what they will get. If you have a brand, that is something imprinted in your head, having a meaning. [...] There is always a tradeoff between the cost, what customers can afford, and what they can motivate; if it was only for the rest and not the pricing. Technology leadership is what you combine ABB and Stressometer with. ABB is the key placeholder for branding. As we said, ABB stands for stability, local offices, local service, and quality. This gives each of the companies stability. (Product & Market Development Manager)

With the brand core ideology of quality and technology leadership in mind, Fixell made it clear that delivering poor quality can quickly ruin a brand and its position on the market. The following quotation illustrates this point on the grounds of a limited customer base and the need to constantly develop better products:

Our customers are not that many. And they have conferences, they talk to each other, possibly they have global companies running mills all over the world. If you have bad quality, even though we position ourselves as a high-quality supplier, this rumor will spread quickly. If we need to replace a product, it's not an option to replace something with less performance. We need to verify that we have the same performance or better performance compared to the old generation. So whenever we make changes in generations of the products we need to make sure that this one does not ruin our reputation. (Product & Market Development Manager)

Fixell thinks it is very difficult to "generate an ABB brand that actually covers everything". However, the following quotation illustrates that the Force Measurement business unit can also connect to the brand vision, *Power and Productivity for a Better World*, a tagline assessed as being very strong.

The good thing is that the tagline survives from a statement and from a vision point of view. It covers also what we have seen the last years that everyone is driving for lower energy consumption, which 'power and productivity for a better world' captures and still covers today. From a design point of view...[it] is something everybody knows because in every presentation, in every data sheet, it's published everywhere. [The] last slide on every PowerPoint presentation is *Power and Productivity for a Better World*. If you haven't seen it, you have been really closing your eyes. So that is well known, but not the core values and what we actually stand for. (Product & Market Development Manager)

Nevertheless, Fixell was unsure about how much the ABB brand can strengthen the already strong technology heritage of his product area. The following quotation shows the multifaceted relation between ABB, Stressometer, and the former ASEA heritage:

From a *Stressometer* and Force Measurement point of view, we just changed the name on the letters and the roof of the building by changing it from ASEA to ABB. I mean, this is still the same company. [...] But what it meant to the organization – I don't know. We even kept the same sales people when we merged [...] Some things changed, but Force Measurement is more or less the same company, and the brand *Stressometer* has been the same all the way, even though we changed to ABB. (Product & Market Development Manager)

Product Manager Eva Wadman partly agreed that the merger and new brand name changed the products only to a very small degree. Yet, she added that the ABB organization allowed for other channels to reach customers. As an example, she mentions the change of the business unit (Measurement Products), where access to more salespeople was provided. Wadman believes that most substantial changes since the merger relate to the market mechanism development from “technology push to market pull”:

We have moved our positions and we are asking ‘what could we do for this market’, more than ‘what could *Pressductor* do for the world’, so to speak. (Wadman, Product Manager)

Fixell argued similarly and illustrated his thoughts by describing changes in the competitive landscape. The following quotation illustrates that many companies are working on a global platform, in which companies merge to get a global footprint.

There is a change...[from] ‘we have a product, where can we place it?’ to ‘we have a market and we need a product’. So that is a huge change. That would have happened, independent of what company we belong to, if it's ASEA, ABB, I think it's a natural development that you will see in many companies that you push the technology or you actually produce what the market needs [...] There is always a fight for the customers and the one that is actually the best one to meet the customers' needs will be the one that wins. (Product & Market Development Manager)

From a customer perception point of view, Fixell sees ABB's brand image as related to “global availability”, offering “reliable” and “robust” products, and providing “technology leadership”. The intention to always be regarded as being in the leading position is illustrated by the following quotation:

One way or another, we will never be satisfied with being second best or third best in class. So we are always driving to be the first. So that's from an ABB point of view and then, of course, the product as such drives the customer benefits in unique installations. But from an R&D point of view we never give up. (Product & Market Development Manager)

Wadman explained that from a product manager's perspective, the brand is an important thing in keeping “the impression of an ABB product”. The product

development and design part requires utilizing the visual guidelines that have been developed on the corporate level and customized for business-level use. The following quotation illustrates the ways in which visual brand identity guidelines determine what the finished product should look like:

The ABB brand is really important to us and crucial for me. I try to monitor that the development department really conducts accordingly. Sometimes I find something that is not really according to that and then they [technical product developers] have to re-do it. [...] They are thinking about the functionality but are not having [the visual identity guidelines] in mind. The design really affects the mind of the user. Well, most of the design ends up in a cabin somewhere, so you don't see it all the time. Nevertheless, if you open up the cabin you should be proud of what you see there. (Product Manager)

Explaining the product development and communication role of the brand, respondents did not seem to have the same understanding. Fixell thinks it is difficult to differentiate between processes of branding and product development, and the importance of each:

We don't discard development because it doesn't meet the brand itself and what it stands for. I would say we have more or less been involved in developing *Stressometer* and the other products for so long; it's a constant evolution. I don't know, it's hard to argue if the brand has emerged from the evolution or if the evolution is a result of that brand. I think it is more the first one, that we have created the brand itself and what it stands for from the evolution of the products. And in the end that is not something put on the table when we make a decision in developing a new product or a new version. It's part of our life, the way we act. We are not looking for the mainstream products. Very often we are at the edge of what is possible to create. (Product & Market Development Manager)

Wadman, in contrast, thinks that evaluations regarding the 'fit' with the brand are clearly part of the product development process. However, product development decision-making is not directly based on branding, as an open discussion on the brand concept of 'fit' is missing:

Once we decided to make a development, the look and feel of the product, the ease of use, which is part of development project as such, is of course very important. But the brand *Stressometer* [...] is not a part of the decision of a new product. [...] This is built into the company. I mean, if you say you would like to have a new product, does it matter if we have *Pressductor* as a brand or not? You don't base your decision on the branding. We base it on the customer needs and the business potential. (Product Manager)

Fodor also inferred that there is no apparent discussion around this topic, whereas Fixell thinks this is "built into the culture of the company" and even has a "subconscious" character, as Wadman added. Fodor complemented the discussion with a few rules he learned when he started working for the group and the *Stressometer* brand:

There are a few things where we are cautious, because we are known for, and this goes for all new products as well. For example, we don't look after the cheapest components and it's not something we prioritize. This is coming from the culture. So that is why we got a brand name for the other products also. (System Development Manager)

### ***Brand Positioning Action***

At Force Measurement, the positioning is mostly discussed in the context of product development processes that take a strategic business perspective rather than a conscious brand perspective:

The reputation we have and the brand, what it stands for, is built from the business we have done. So we have earned our position on the market. [...] Since it is business-driven, we don't allow ourselves to go anywhere else and say 'ok, let's run something low cost'. That wouldn't happen... It's not like someone has said 'oh, this is a nice brand [...], we should build a business upon it' [...] We might be changing the way we communicate the brand itself and adapt it [...], but the industry is quite conservative, so it's not changing that fast. (Product & Market Development Manager)

Wadman explained that in a product development process, the unit wants to convey what is agreed upon using terms like 'quality' or 'robustness'. These functional characteristics will basically work for "any other product within ABB"; however, she is not sure if these words are also valid for others. Similar to the work of the marketing communications team around Ottoson, Wadman and her product manager colleagues are conducting customer interviews as part of the process of developing new or improved products:

We are doing market analysis to get the market requirements for each product line. What is required from the customer side, what is really the customer need? Not so much 'how the product should look like', 'what details should be there'. It's the needs, what benefits the customer is looking for. I think by meeting the customer you gain a lot more information than from surveys, and you get it between the lines. (Product Manager)

Once the needs of the customers are 'captured', product managers interpret these needs and translate them into market requirements that will fit the next product to be developed.

We select the market segment that should be the aim for this new product. So the market requirements we select should fit with this segment, so to speak, because you can't satisfy all. When we select market segments, of course we look at the potential of this segment. What market share do we have today, what could we achieve with a better product; so business potential is calculated. Then we address these market requirements with the product development project. The projects' task of refining the market requirements into product requirements is very detailed, so that you can actually create a product. (Product Manager)



Wadman explained that positioning is not directly discussed during new product development, even though it is discussed before the start of a product development project and also later, during the discussing and choosing of value messages:

When you decide which portfolio should be there, you have to discuss the positioning as well: 'why should this product be there', 'what is the message that comes with the product' and 'how does it fit with the other products'? [You do this] before the project, when you decide which portfolio to use and also during the value messaging, when you create the brochures. During the project, we are not talking positioning [...] Developers need to understand the positioning, but I don't think they will change the positioning, so to speak. (Product Manager)

Fixell reinforced that positioning starts with a long-term strategy, covering questions of product needs and target markets; that is, questions regarding why a customer should buy a product from ABB and not from a competitor. He explained that this type of investigation will, in some cases, result in finding "white spots":

Of course we look at the competitors, we know what the competitors are doing. But we get the questions more or less from the customers. They have seen something, some functionality, and say 'this is what we would like to have'. We don't do any deep analysis of the competitors and pinpoint what they have and don't have [...] We must have a clear idea of this before starting a project. If not, we won't be successful, so this is important. That is the positioning we do, and from that we extract what product needs to develop. (Product & Market Development Manager)

The following quotation illustrates that positioning also becomes important *during* the project, when the discussion between product and R&D managers in gate meetings or steering committees becomes too technical:

During the development as such for a product, we don't discuss positioning. That decision has already been made. But, of course, if you find out during the development that we are not capable of meeting the requirements for the project, there could be a discussion...[Then] they are discussing positioning as well, and sometimes the product managers need to listen and say 'sorry, you are running down the wrong track, you need to change your objectives'. (Product & Market Development Manager)

Once the initial positioning discussion has led to the subsequent product development steps according to the 'gate model' (that is, a project business decision model), the positioning discussion resumes before the start of marketing communications for the new offering. The team works with creating material involving product management, marketing communications, and sales. Wadman explained that these communication brochures need to contain all customer values and benefits, expressed in a clear and understandable way. This involves many discussions around ways of expressing these values. Ottoson added that this element is about creating texts that "the customer will understand and that are beneficial for him". He also referred to it as task that is quite difficult and time-consuming; the process can take three to five months with meetings every week. Fixell added that communication material is created to convince customers on different levels in each

respective company (that is, approaching different functions like financial managers, general managements, and the engineers and purchasers, as actual decision makers). Here, salespeople are important transmitters of an intended position, as they “understand the capability of the product” and “what kind of customers they are having close by”, evaluating whether it will be possible to approach a customer with an offer, as Fixell explained.

### *Brand Position Implementation*

Ottoson referred to brand position implementation as creating “a lot of success stories”. The material for the story construction is gathered from current customers and is then used to sell the branded products and solutions to potential customers:

We visit [customer] installations we have around the world, interview the people there, and take pictures of our installations [...] We are using the benefits we get from these [customer] statements in order to sell them into the next potential customer. That’s the way of getting the trademark out. They shouldn’t even use the word ‘flatness control systems’, they should use *Stressometer* and then we would have succeeded! And they do, a lot of customers do. They ask for *Stressometer* and they know what it is. I think we have been really successful actually. [...] A potential customer wants to know what an existing customer thinks about the system and products. It’s very important. Because they listen more to what other customers say than to us. They want to be really convinced that this system is the best in the world. I would say that the best sales material we have is actually the reference book. (Market Communication Manager)

Ottoson further reflected upon the process of creating the story material for catalogues as consisting of many team meetings. The following quotation illustrates the shift toward communicating value-based offerings and messages:

It actually takes a while to produce a thing like that, you know, what is our message here. That’s important to start with: ‘what should we focus on’. We are doing better now with these value-based offerings. Because we don’t want to sell on price, we just want to sell all the benefits and features we have in our products. (Market Communication Manager)

Fixell added that Force Measurement does not have “any mass communication” of their products. However, identifying the appropriate trade fairs for targeting potential customers and solid customer insights are essential marketing activities within the unit. His assessment can be illustrated by the following:

We have quite a good idea about the customers. ‘Who is actually rebuilding their plant? Who is building a new plant?’ And then we approach them one by one. So we don’t have any mass communication, not for *Stressometer*. We don’t have that much mass communication from the ABB brand either; [like] for any industrial company, I would say, because we know who our customers are. So we need to be very [precise] in terms of how we reach our customers. (Product & Market Development Manager)

Fixell mentioned a benefit-oriented business approach as the units' major focus in marketing and selling their products. Investing in a *Stressometer* system "is quite a huge investment", and the typical customer will not replace it for at least 15 years:

We actually need to focus on what you gain from it [...] Customers really need to be convinced that this is a good investment and that they are doing it for the right cause. [That's] why it is important to have the references in order to say 'yes, this has been done earlier'. (Product & Market Development Manager)

### ***Brand Positioning Outcomes***

For Force Measurement products, technological innovation and product development processes have created a technology leadership position over the years. For example, the *Stressometer* product brand (based on the *Pressductor* technology brand) owns a reputation as the world standard for flatness measurement and control in flat rolling mills. Outcomes directly related to new product launches and updates are product reference books that tell a story about the usefulness of the individual products and its intended position.

### ***Brand Positioning Challenges***

An ongoing challenge is to ensure the consistent delivery of high-quality products, in order to avoid ruining both the *Stressometer* and the ABB brand and promise. Recently, the possibility of reaching the mid-segment has been assessed due to some offerings being often over-specified, making customers unwilling to pay the extra cost for benefits they don't particularly need. This possibility offers both opportunities and threats, mostly regarding creating and offering products that are or are not good enough to bear the brand name ABB. Finally, an articulated challenge is making sure that the core values of the ABB brand are actually incorporated in the business unit's products and solutions.

Table 11 summarizes empirical findings of business-level brand positioning processes.

**Table 11**

## Summary of business-level brand positioning

Drivers	Action	Outcomes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Delivering technology leadership products and solutions</li> <li>- Following corporate brand guidelines</li> <li>- Responding to customers needs and business opportunities</li> <li>- Keeping impression and expression of 'an ABB product'</li> <li>- Strongly routed culture of quality, reliability, and technology leadership.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Analyzing markets and generating customer insights</li> <li>- Observing and tracking competitors</li> <li>- Translating captured customer needs and market requirements into refined specifics for product development</li> <li>- Aligning product development activities with visual-identity guidelines (steering R&amp;D in the right way)</li> <li>- Discussing product brand expression before and after product development processes</li> <li>- Also discussing product brand expression during product development when agreed-upon requirements could not be met</li> <li>- Using customer references to communicate intended position and success stories (value messages)</li> <li>- Developing story material for value-based offerings in numerous team meetings</li> <li>- Briefing sales force to ensure correct transmission of intended position</li> <li>- Identifying appropriate trade fairs to target potential customers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Product reference books</li> <li>- Technology leadership position</li> <li>- Reputation for being the world standard for flatness measurement and control in flat rolling mills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assessing possibilities of reaching 'mid-segment'</li> <li>- Making sure core values of corporate brand are incorporated in BUs offerings</li> <li>- Making sure to consistently deliver high quality as BU offerings are connected to corporate brand promise</li> </ul>

# Chapter 6 | Positioning Trelleborg

## About the Case Company

Trelleborg AB (Trelleborg) is a world-leading engineering company, engaged in polymer technology providing solutions that seal, damp, and protect in demanding industrial environments. The company operates in the Americas, Europe, and Asia and is headquartered in Trelleborg, Sweden. Worldwide, the group employs around 20,000 people.



**Figure 18**  
Trelleborg logo

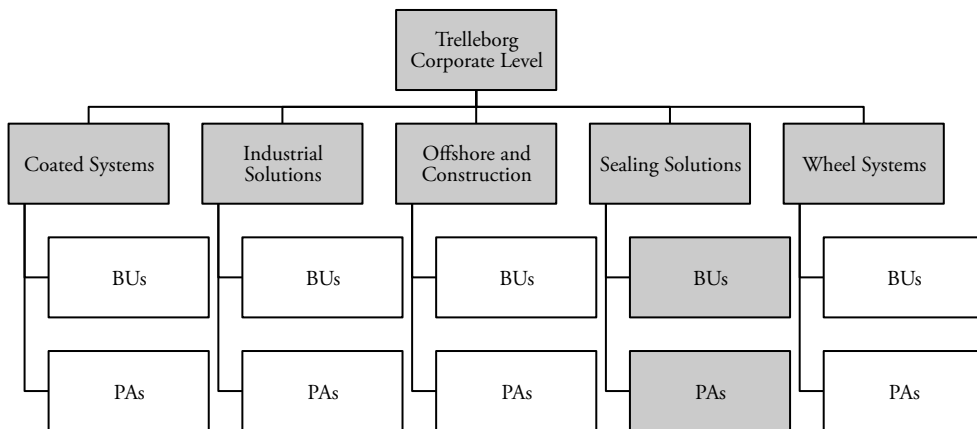
### ***Brief History***

Trelleborg was founded in 1905, as a rubber production business. The entrepreneur Henry Dunker acquired a struggling rubber production plant founded 1896 in the town of Trelleborg, and renamed it to *Trelleborg's Gummifabrik AB*. After years of growth and internationalization and working mainly with car and truck tires, Trelleborg stopped producing tires by the mid-1970s. As a consequence to portfolio changes, the company's name was shortened from *Trelleborg's Gummifabrik AB* to *Trelleborg AB*, as part of an effort to highlight that the company was no longer merely

a rubber products company. However, industrial rubber products still accounted for most sales when Trelleborg transformed into a fast-growing industrial conglomerate, during the 1980s. The corporation primarily expanded through acquisitions and was divided into several businesses that were not close to the core competency anymore (Trelleborg Brand Centenary, published external document). By the end of the 1990s, a strategic shift brought Trelleborg back to focusing its businesses on polymer solutions and divesting non-core businesses. Today, the company continues to position its businesses for profitable growth and to build a focused polymer group by improving structure, portfolio, and geographical balance.

### ***Organizational Structure***

Until recently, Trelleborg operated through four business areas (BA): Trelleborg Engineered Systems, Trelleborg Automotive, Trelleborg Sealing Solutions, and Trelleborg Wheel Systems. During the process of studying Trelleborg’s brand positioning practices, the organizational structure changed due to a joint venture (JV) in the Trelleborg Automotive BA. Most parts of the Automotive BA merged with German Freudenberg Group to form a new company called *TrelleborgVibraoustic*. Since then, Trelleborg has been operating with five business areas: *Trelleborg Wheel Systems* (as before), *Trelleborg Sealing Solutions* (as before), *Trelleborg Industrial Solutions*, *Trelleborg Coated Systems*, and *Trelleborg Offshore and Construction* (before, part of Trelleborg Engineered Systems). Figure 19 visualizes Trelleborg’s organizational structure.



***Figure 19***  
Trelleborg organizational structure

In this case study the focus is on two parts of investigating positioning practice. The first part aims to investigate positioning practices at the Trelleborg corporate brand-building level, and the second part illustrates positioning practices at Trelleborg business level. The Rubore daughter brand acts as an embedded case for investigating positioning from a business and product brand-building perspective and in the context of the corporate brand.

### ***Competitive Landscape***

Annually, the rubber industry generates approximately € 105 billion in sales. By far, the world's largest rubber companies are Bridgestone, of Japan; Michelin, of France; and Goodyear, of the US. These brand names are mostly associated with the tire industry, which is where about half of all rubber is used. The remaining rubber consumption is divided evenly between the automotive industry and industrial and consumer products. Within the industrial rubber sector, the French company Hutchinson and the German company Continental are among the largest players, in addition to Trelleborg. The automotive industry alone is a major consumer of rubber; a car contains the notable number of more than 1000 rubber components. Such components are primarily seals for flow systems and vibration and sound damping systems that make everyday life more comfortable, safer, and more environmentally friendly. Most of Trelleborg's products and solutions can be described as second tier, meaning that a lot of seals go into a component (for example, a car), and then there are a lot of steps to be taken before reaching the final consumer (Trelleborg – A World of Rubber, published external document).

### ***Brand Strategy***

Trelleborg builds on a *mother-daughter brand strategy*, in which the credibility of the mother brand is the basis of the daughter brand's identity. This strategy creates scope for daughter brands to develop in a non-conflicting way. In turn, these sub-brands can help positioning the mother brand (Trelleborg) in different segments and markets. Trelleborg's brand strategy is based on a uniform, general competitive position based on the company's core competencies to seal, damp, and protect in demanding industrial environments. Trelleborg highlights the importance of a strong corporate brand, as it builds trust over time, presents one face to the world, defines the organization and what it stands for, endorses and supports product/service brands in the portfolio, differentiates Trelleborg to avoid competition solely on cost, and creates trust that leads to loyalty. The decision to prioritize Trelleborg, as a corporate brand with scope for daughter brands, signals the intention of developing long-term operations, especially when incorporating acquired companies in the corporate brand

strategy. Peter Nilsson, Trelleborg's current CEO, emphasized that the mother brand (Trelleborg), as well as every strategic or tactical daughter brand, is an important economic and emotional asset that must be treated responsibly and with consideration. The overall brand strategy objective is to maximize brand efficiency within the Trelleborg group through leveraging synergies between corporate brand and business levels (Trelleborg Brand Book, unpublished internal document).

### ***Brand Position and Perception***

The Trelleborg brand is well recognized throughout the world in a range of market segments. It represents Trelleborg's promise to seal, damp, and protect critical applications in demanding environments. As for Trelleborg Coated Systems (TCS), this BA is a leading global supplier of unique customer solutions for polymer-coated fabrics that are deployed in a variety of niche segments. Trelleborg Industrial Solutions (TIS) is a market leader in application areas such as fluid handling solutions, industrial anti-vibration solutions, and niche applications in sealing systems. As for Trelleborg Offshore & Construction (TOC), this BA is a leading global supplier of critical solutions for deployment in highly demanding environments. Trelleborg Sealing Solutions (TSS) is a leading global supplier of sealing solutions. Finally, Trelleborg Wheel Systems (TWS) is a market leader in tires and other wheel systems for agricultural and forestry vehicles, forklift trucks, and other materials-handling vehicles (Trelleborg AB, 2013).

## **Brand Positioning at Corporate Level**

### **Brand Strategy Formation and Positioning (1999–2005)**

Trelleborg became a fast-growing industrial conglomerate under CEO Rune Andersson, during the 1980s. This decade was characterized by rapid sales and employee growth driven by acquisitions. Between 1983 and 1989, sales multiplied more than tenfold, and the number of employees quintupled (Trelleborg Brand Centenary, published external document). Viktoria Bergman, former head of corporate communications, explained that Trelleborg was quickly divided into several different businesses that were not the core competency of the corporation anymore. This development led to the impression that Trelleborg acquired a company "almost every week". This strategic shift had an impact on the Trelleborg brand, because "suddenly the corporate brand Trelleborg was not driving the strategy anymore", Bergman reasoned. She further explained that conglomerates and holding companies



were a trend in those days, aiming at high diversification. In 1990, Kjell Nilsson took over a very diversified group under unfavorable business conditions. This resulted in the need to sell some non-core businesses. In the mid-1990s, Trelleborg changed its 'T-Triangle' brand logotype to an expanded version with three open triangles (see Figure 18) representing the expansion of the group (Trelleborg Brand Centenary, published external document).

### ***Brand Positioning Drivers***

Fredrik Arp, who had previously for Trelleborg, joined the company again in 1999. He became the sixth CEO in the history of Trelleborg and introduced a new strategic direction, focusing on the industrial sector. These changes were necessary, as Trelleborg's shares had been developing negatively, which also led to an accumulation of undesirable business press coverage. Arp then laid the foundations for repositioning the company, which has utilized substantial amounts of its financial resources for external growth through acquisitions, in order to become a global industrial group with pioneering expertise in advanced polymer technology (Trelleborg Press Release, 2005). Bergman explained that Arp decided to divest all the businesses that were non-core; during a time in which 'focus' is often talked about, Trelleborg decided to return to the core of polymer engineering, Bergman explained. She emphasized that at that point, the CEO's choice was to particularly make the automotive industry a core business. Consequently, several automotive businesses within the rubber and polymer arena were acquired. Following the launch of a new strategic focus in 1999, the operations in the early 2000s were concentrated on the industrial sector and the group was reorganized, with many divestments and acquisitions. The first event in this new strategy of industrial expansion was the decision to acquire the anti-vibration operations British company Invensys, in 2000. Several other acquisitions followed with the aim of strengthening leading global positions with polymer solutions. Bergman joined Trelleborg in 2002 and along with the altered corporate strategy, also saw the need to "focus on the brand again". The decision to focus on Trelleborg as the corporate brand was based on the intention to drive growth internationally, to bring clarity to the corporate structure, and to avoid being labeled a conglomerate by the financial markets. The opportunity to leverage the corporate brand and harvest synergies across the group was another important driver of implementing a corporate brand strategy.

Another critical event driving corporate brand strategy formation was the 2003 acquisition of Busak & Shamban, a precision-seals business, previously owned by the Smiths Group Plc. The new company was subsequently integrated into Trelleborg as a new business area called Trelleborg Sealing Solutions (TSS). This was the largest acquisition in the history of Trelleborg, and was helpful in shaping what Trelleborg stands for. Bergman referred to this acquisition as creating an even closer link between

corporate brand and corporate strategy to “form the new Trelleborg even narrower to the core polymer and seal”. The following quotation shows that until 2005, Trelleborg never had a clearly formulated brand strategy.

Trelleborg was made of more than one hundred acquisitions. A lot of companies were keeping their name, their brands. Anyone was allowed to do that in case they did not want to change. There was no push and no strategy. [...] No one [was] able to tell me how many brands and companies we had in the Trelleborg Group. You had to sit down and just count all the different company names. It was brands on a daughter brand level, on a naming level, and on a lot of other levels. Also from a legal point of view a lot of this didn’t make sense at all. So we took the brand strategy and put it into a brand policy [...] to work with Trelleborg as the corporate and umbrella brands driving the company. (Bergman, Head of Corporate Communications, 2003-2011)

In 2005, Trelleborg celebrated its centenary, and current CEO Peter Nilsson replaced Fredrik Arp in the position; Arp left after nearly seven years of leading Trelleborg. Respondents described Nilsson as someone who recognizes and actively endorses branding the Trelleborg corporation. Bergman referred to the 2003 acquisition and the appointment of CEO Peter Nilsson in 2005 as two major changes that fueled corporate brand strategy formation and repositioning the corporation with the help of the brand. She stressed that when talking about the brand, one must also talk about the development of the corporation; for example, a strong connection between brand and business questions is needed in order “to be able to take care of both acquisitions and divestments from a brand strategy perspective”. The following quotation shows how tightly interwoven brand and business strategies are, and need to be, in order to be successful.

Brand and business strategies connect all the time. Sometimes the brand development is one step ahead and then the strategy, and then the brand development again, and so on [...] One should never underestimate the CEO’s strategy and the CEO’s role in which brand strategy to choose. Now strategy is more and more refined, as we put our efforts into certain segments and profitable niches within our area, both geographically and segment-wise. At the same time, we refine our brand management thinking [...] we couldn’t have done this before because we were not that mature. (Head of Corporate Communications, 2003-2011)

### ***Brand Positioning Action***

Bergman explained that “it was fairly easy to consider what needed to be done” when preparing for and implementing a brand strategy. This included putting basic documents, like a brand policy and legal requirements, on a “hygiene level” in order to make sure that “everyone knows, this is how we work with brands at Trelleborg”. The former head of corporate communications further characterized her managerial approach to forming a brand strategy as very determined, strict, and without

involving many people in the organization during the initial stage. A brand strategy, she explained, needs to be “put in from the top, saying ‘this is the way we do it’”. However, in areas where, for example, core values needed to be discussed and formulated, workshops were needed to facilitate such discussions. Bergman reasoned that these cultural discussions included many people from the organization so as “to get everyone connected.” She also described the visual brand identity decision-process that followed the brand strategy development as one that needed to be controlled. The following quotation illustrates that managing this process in a ‘police-like fashion’ was necessary to make sure people in the organization would understand and follow the strategy.

The first phase was sort of ‘clean and wipe’. [...] Then you cannot be the very nice person, you need to be the police. Just do it and go there, be there, and check if everything is done in the right way. Otherwise you will never get them [business units] to do it. That was the first thing. At the same time of course, we discussed a lot [about] what the Trelleborg core is. Because seal, damp, and protect was not present at that time. It was, in 2004, when we started to develop that concept. Once you have a brand strategy you also discuss the brand values and what the brand itself is. (Head of Corporate Communications, 2003-2011)

The brand strategy development process can be described as emergent rather than deliberate:

I had the freedom to do things, and I have done things very fast. Of course, sometimes it was not exactly the way we wanted to have it. And then you have to adjust in certain ways. But I think it also has been good, because people in the organization also feel and see that things have happened [...] now a lot has been done because otherwise people get tired of just listening to things and not seeing it. (Head of Corporate Communications, 2003-2011)

However, it becomes apparent that there is a difficulty in finding a common denominator in positioning a complex industrial brand and in the balancing act of coherence and consistency:

When we position the corporate brand, then you see the huge amount of different solutions we have. Of course, the respective positions of our business units and product areas are a little bit different, but still connected. They are part of Trelleborg but they are, of course, not exactly matching, because some are in infrastructure or other segments. I think they use positioning in a more specialized way, and we must have something that is taking the whole group into consideration. (Annehed, Communication Manager)

The development of the mother-daughter brand strategy for Trelleborg is important when discussing positioning. The rationale behind working with daughter brands is to “take care of different competitors”, Bergman explained. The following quotation illustrates that an overall position of the corporate brand is aimed at creating space for customized positions of sub-brands with their own value propositions for different contexts.

Daughter brands should support the Trelleborg positioning, and don't necessarily need to have all its elements. But they should not be in conflict with the Trelleborg brand. [...] If they are in conflict, then we need to create a sub-brand and a brand strategy that is not connected to Trelleborg. [...] The important part is that the process is synergy-driven: all our daughter brands should support the Trelleborg brand and the Trelleborg brand supports all the daughter brands. (Head of Corporate Communications, 2003-2011)

The brand promise and position '*innovative and reliable solutions that seal, damp, and protect*' was developed based on the corporation's core values: customer focus, performance, innovation, and responsibility (Trelleborg Core Values, unpublished internal document). Communications Manager Rosman Jahja explained that Trelleborg's core values are the internal values. The brand values mirror the same values from the outside, and while they are very connected, they are not exactly the same. Grasping the salient values and unique points of differentiation in the organization, from a historical development and heritage perspective, was emphasized as an important task during the brand strategy formation process, as illustrated by the following quotation on the brand value '*reliability*':

Coming from the history of Trelleborg and what we do, the core of the business is the reliability part. It is extremely strong, because reliability is actually what our rubber and polymer products are all about. For more than 100 years they stand fire. That is why you need it and really use it. If you are going to seal something that is really crucial, you use the most reliable material you have. Reliability has been part of Trelleborg's history all the way. Also seal, damp, protect has been part of it, but we have never said it this way. It has always been there, but not expressed. (Head of Corporate Communications, 2003-2011)

Besides defining the reliability brand value that has been saliently built into the products, material, company, and people in Trelleborg, expressing the *innovation* brand value had a more aspirational function:

Trelleborg is an entrepreneurial organization because we had and have a very decentralized organization. People have done a lot of things out there, very innovative and entrepreneurial. But another thing is that it has not been expressed like innovation. Entrepreneurs are doing one shot there, one shot there, and it has not been innovation in the more strategic sense. [...] Innovation is the brand value that we need to further build in the company. (Head of Corporate Communications, 2003-2011)

## *Brand Positioning Outcomes*

Communications Manager Jahja illustrated the outcome of the brand strategy formation process and how it relates to corporate strategy:

We have a business concept, which is basically to seal, damp, and protect. To seal, damp, and protect is also part of our brand values. The linkage is obviously there. I mean, the business concept as such is part of our brand. The other important brand element is reliability, which has to do with the history of our company. The third part of the triangle that we usually illustrate is innovation. This is also at the heart of what we are doing, because we live for innovating polymer solutions for our customers. I think there is a strong link between what is described as our brand, and our brand values, and our business, and our business concept. (Jahja, Communication Manager)

The importance of the business concept and brand values were summarized by Communications Manager Annehed, who explained that “seal, damp, and protect is what brings the company together”. However, in a complex organization such as Trelleborg, there are cases that don’t fit the overall approach, which requires certain trade-offs:

All areas can feel that they are part of Trelleborg, because this is linked together. If you work within the automotive segment you damp a lot, if you work in the seal business it’s sealing, and a lot of our products protect. I think the brand strategy and business strategy are linked. There could be some units that are not so happy with those three words, but for the majority [it works]. (Annehed, Communication Manager)

Trelleborg’s former head of strategic development explained that since the brand strategy and brand values were developed, all topics related to brand and branding have increased in importance:

To me, the brand is to some extent very high on the agenda. It’s close to the vision and mission statements and what we do and it’s all about, particularly given the history of Trelleborg with all these acquisitions in the past. We have had a tendency to focus less on the Trelleborg brand, and that is why the Trelleborg brand is maybe not so well known out in the world. Today, we are [a] top three player in the world of what is called ‘industrial rubber’ or ‘non-tire rubber’, and we have a lot of really interesting positions that we should be proud of. (Meuller, Strategic Development Director)

This increased focus on the Trelleborg corporate brand and the closer link between brand and corporate strategy started developing from the strategic shift and specifically since the acquisition of Busak & Shamban (TSS). Brand strategy, policy, and position-related documents can be mentioned as additional outcomes during this episode (for example, core value booklet, brand book, code of conduct, communications policy, brand policy, trademark policy, employer branding material, and visual identity manuals).

## Brand Positioning Challenges

This positioning episode started with the challenge of being confronted with a loss of reputation and trust from the financial community. Great efforts needed to be made to convince financial analysts to recommend Trelleborg shares again. Making brand strategy and architecture decisions and positioning a restructured corporate brand needed the consideration of the vast amount of different business units and product areas. This proved to be a challenge, as Trelleborg's management needed to deal with the consequences of a conglomerate-driven strategy in the past: defining common values, brand elements, and differentiated position in spite of a large diversity. Finally, finding a brand strategy that was able to work with and for different business models was a major challenge.

Table 12 summarizes empirical findings during episode one at corporate level.

**Table 12**

Summary of empirical findings during episode one

Drivers	Action	Outcomes	Challenges
- Accumulation of bad press coverage	- Laying foundations for repositioning company by acquiring companies within polymer business (such as key acquisition of Busak & Shamban)	- Closer link between brand and corporate strategy since key acquisition (Busak & Shamban)	- Dealing with loss of reputation and trust from financial community
- New CEO (Arp) enforcing strategic shift (advanced polymer technology)	- Divesting non-core businesses and particularly making the automotive industry core business under CEO Arp	- Increased focus on Trelleborg corporate brand	- Positioning the corporate brand considering vast amount of different BUs and PAs
- Divesting non-core businesses	- Constantly repeating strategies and actions internally and externally (showing repositioning endurance)	- Brand strategy and policy documents	- Dealing with consequences of historical conglomerate-driven strategy (defining common values and differentiated position)
- Acquiring companies to strengthen intended position	- Using acquired companies as representations of change and positive outlook	- Advertising campaigns	- Finding brand strategy to synchronize with different business models
- Appointment of new CEO changing the strategic agenda	- Developing brand strategy in conjunction with refined corporate strategy		
- Enhancing geographical balance and focusing on profitable niche segments	- Asking for external brand consultancy advice		
	- Deciding to work with Trelleborg as corporate brand driving the company		
	- Deciding to work with tactical daughter brands in exceptional cases		
	- Utilizing business concept 'seal, damp, and protect' as pillar for corporate brand		
	- Adding brand values 'reliability' and 'innovation'		
	- Organizing workshops to define Trelleborg's core values ('customer focus', 'performance', 'innovation', and 'responsibility')		
	- Creating brand policy documents to educate and guide employees		
	- Defining brand promise: 'Innovative and reliable solutions that seal, damp and protect'		
	- Strongly emphasizing Trelleborg as 'the one' brand		
	- Aligning brand and corporate strategy to be able to handle M&A activities from a positioning perspective		
	- Translating positioning strategy into corporate advertising campaign		

## Strategic Reorientation and Repositioning (2011–2014)

When talking about the status quo of working with the brand strategy as well as future brand initiatives within the group, Bergman referred to it as “the next level of brand management”. The following quotation illustrates how the mother-daughter brand strategy is supposed to be applied.

What we are now aiming at is the next level of brand management. Before we had to be very strong in emphasizing the Trelleborg brand as the one brand. Now we have matured and we have the brand strategy in place and out there. Now we can start to work with brand management in a more refined way, for example, working with daughter brands in a more mature way like you do in the consumer business. For example in Trelleborg Wheel Systems we have started to work with different brands for certain segments and markets in a way we could not do before, because we would have been cannibalizing on Trelleborg. Now we are in a phase where we can handle working with the mother-daughter brand structure in a more professional way. (Head of Corporate Communications, 2003-2011)

The company’s current journey can be illustrated by its efforts towards strengthening its position as a world leader in engineered polymer solutions in selected markets segments and with strategic acquisitions. Brand-positioning-related questions, which were yet to be satisfactorily answered, led to a corporate brand repositioning process during 2011. These unsolved “competitive positioning” issues included open questions regarding the brand perception of Trelleborg versus key competitors’, Trelleborg brand differentiators and unique elements, and how the Trelleborg brand can provide additional value compared to competition. Stefan Svärdenborn, global brand & marketing director, highlighted the goal of creating an “entire positioning hierarchy” in order to “find a good way to link the competitive positioning of respective offerings and entities” with the “overall positioning of Trelleborg as a corporate brand”. This goal gave the direction for the positioning and corporate brand platform-building processes, adding more emphasis on Trelleborg’s competitive strengths and the value its many businesses create for customers.

### ***Brand Positioning Drivers***

Bergman and Svärdenborn see the digital development with social media and digital channels as driving forces in brand management. This development forces companies “to be very transparent in [...] who you are, what you do, and at the same time not to confuse the customers or the distributors in any way”, Bergman explained. Discussions with business units and product areas need to revolve around digital channels, as “the branding process starts online” with the goal to reach new customers, Svärdenborn added. Resource efficiency is another driver of brand management efforts, in addition to media development and transparency issues. The

following quotation illustrates that Trelleborg and other companies can no longer afford to take care of brand management in inefficient ways:

So many brands and companies are competing out there. It is the buzz, the speed, the amount of products and solutions. It increases all the time, life cycles getting shorter. All of these things make a strict brand management more and more important. You have to be very clear about your positioning; otherwise you cannot win. (Head of Corporate Communications, 2003-2011)

Svärdenborn was hired in October of 2010 to strengthen the Trelleborg brand and to further advance brand management within the group. He explained that his position as global brand & marketing director was created with the purpose to “ultimately strengthen the Trelleborg brand internally and externally across all our business units and geographies”, a task previously managed by Bergman.

Several things then happened that triggered an emerging corporate brand repositioning process in 2011. These incidents can be described as initiating and driving the repositioning process of Trelleborg as a corporate brand. First, a major corporate restructuring move (that is, the joint venture between Trelleborg Automotive and German competitor Freudenberg) was ongoing. These restructuring activities affected the Trelleborg corporate architecture and portfolio. The former Strategic Development Director explained that this JV is “a new crossroads for what the group will be focusing on in the future”.

Second, in response to these structural changes and in line with further strengthening brand management in Trelleborg, Svärdenborn took the opportunity to review and build upon the brand base that already existed. There had been some internal discussions regarding the way in which the Trelleborg brand was perceived compared to the services and solutions that are actually brought to the market; in resonance, many felt that the brand needed to be developed into a direction that was more up-to-date regarding Trelleborg solutions of today, but also from a graphical point of view. The following quotations from business- and corporate-level managers illustrate that building on the existing brand strategy for filling gaps and improving was, in fact, inevitable.

In the past we have not felt that the Trelleborg Group brand was really supporting the business level. [...] It was disconnected and remote from what we actually do. So there was no clear message about what Trelleborg really was in the past I would say. So when you go to meet some of our customers you would have to spend an hour telling them what Trelleborg did and how it worked. [...] Having said that, the visual identity part of the brand has been very good, strong and clean in terms of the logo and how to use it. The guidelines and the guidance around visual identity have been strong, but actually the message behind the guidelines and behind the identity doesn't back that up, I would say.” (Hepworth, Managing Director, Marine Systems BU)



We knew already back then that we needed to build on a very strong base in terms of strategy and governance through the documents and material within the group. We need to twist, turn, and supplement things that we have had. (Svärdenborn, Brand & Marketing Director)

Moreover, the new head of corporate communications, Patrik Romberg, saw the opportunity to review the corporate brand, position, and communications platform to improve integration and sharpen the brand from a commercial point of view:

There was a need to clarify what Trelleborg was today and where to move for the future. Building a platform of strategic positioning, clarifying the promises, different target groups, and below working with other elements such as target group messaging and visual identity to strengthen that message. That's basically why and how it started as an evolutionary journey. (Romberg, Head of Corporate Communications)

Third, Trelleborg was trying to climb the value chain and to move away from products in a way that they can talk about the solutions instead. This is pursued in order to create more value, and to better describe this value, with the ultimate goal of increasing the bottom line and stock price. The following quotation illustrates the goal of transitioning from being a solutions provider to communicating how these solutions create value for the customers:

We also want to take a big step forward in terms of moving from a solutions provider who talks about complete product solutions from a functional perspective, more to highlight what those solutions and systems actually do for the customers, and the customers' business, and the customers' customer. This means much more value-based, benefit-orientated communication and argumentation for the group as a whole and for the respective entities. (Brand & Marketing Director)

The strong role of the CEO in supporting this endeavor is highlighted in the following quotation:

The key reason, for us now reviewing the strategic positioning and the corporate brand platform, has got to do with the fact that Peter [Nilsson, CEO] wants to go out and speak to the investment community once the JV is finally completed. He also wants to tell a strengthened and sharpened Trelleborg story. (Brand & Marketing Director)

Finally, managing organizational belonging of daughter brands with the mother brand Trelleborg as part of the process is an additional theme set out before the repositioning project started, as the following quotation illustrates:

As part of the ongoing process we need to review and clarify how we want to manage the daughter brands and this intermediate level in terms of the organizational belonging or divisional aspects. (Brand & Marketing Director)

## ***Brand Positioning Action***

### *Leveraging Key Committees for Repositioning Facilitation*

Dealing with a highly decentralized organizational structure with independent, powerful business units and product areas was a key challenge during the process. Svärdenborn explained that corporate level needs to ensure that the businesses portray the Trelleborg brand in the right way “without necessarily having a formal mandate or big budgets” to do so. Creating forums that enable Trelleborg to effectively and efficiently communicate with all the people that have a great impact on how the Trelleborg brand is perceived and managed was, therefore, an important step to increase awareness for branding the organization and its business units and product areas.

The first important institution is the *Brand Board*, the highest corporate advisory panel on corporate branding issues, established by Bergman in 2008. It consists of the Corporate Communications team and the five most senior marketing people in each of the business areas; Meuller explained that the Brand Board was established as part of a bigger effort to better communicate brand-related activities across the group and to prevent business areas from working in silos as most of them did in the past. Creating the new position of ‘global brand and marketing director’ sparked discussions about forming two more institutions to focus on branding and marketing issues. Respondents described the second institution, *Marketing Council*, as the most important due to its influence on the overall organization. The council consists of the 20 most senior marketing directors across the group, and aims to actively discuss and steer joint branding efforts to strengthen and develop the Trelleborg brand. Recently, the corporate brand management team decided to change the mix of participants in this forum. The decision contained to include managing directors alongside marketers with the goal to leverage credibility, as Svärdenborn explained.

In areas where we do not have a very senior marketing director, we instead picked or used the managing director or the BU president for this specific entity. And a second reason [besides JV-related changes] was also that we wanted to get some credibility leverage from that forum by including the ‘hardcore’ business people that clearly got a big mandate out in the organization. (Brand & Marketing Director)

The third institution, *Marketing Network*, consists of 200 people globally, from management and sales and that are involved in implementing the businesses’ marketing, branding, and communication efforts. Svärdenborn describes this forum as a “fundamental channel to continuously communicate” with businesses about the Trelleborg brand and its visual alignment. The global brand and marketing director sees the forums’ function as a problem-solver for mismatches between what the corporate brand is and how the business units need to position themselves in their respective businesses to be successful. The goal of this institution is to become a “key enabler of creating a stronger internal brand”, with its members as “ambassadors for

the Trelleborg brand”, Svärdenborn explained. The *Operational Group Management* (OGM) is an executive management institution headed by the Trelleborg CEO; members are the five BA presidents, and group staff executives (for example, head of HR, head of corporate communications, etc.). This institution appeared to be the gatekeeper for support, approval, and decision-making throughout the process of repositioning the corporate brand.

### *Repositioning Planning Phase*

The planning and approach phases started during the summer of 2011. Svärdenborn explained that he started pitching the project internally to his new superior, Patrik Romberg, soon after he took the place of Viktoria Bergman as SVP of corporate communications in October. Eventually, Romberg was convinced by the sketched project proposal and took it to the CEO, who also bought into it. Svärdenborn explained the importance of the CEO and executive management buy-in for the project with the following quotation:

Already from the start and throughout the process, the overall purpose and objective of the platform was revitalizing the Trelleborg brand, strengthening it globally by creating a brand that is more coherent, consistent and tight, leveraging the strength of the group when selling a given business units’ offering, all those fundamentals including ‘we need to sell value, not supplying products’; that has all been agreed from management by day one and that is the most important thing, because if they don’t agree to that, then we got a big issue. (Brand & Marketing Director)

Before the initial kick-off, the decision was made to hire an external brand consultancy as a collaboration partner, with experience working with companies similar to Trelleborg. The following quotation illustrates the importance of experience when choosing a collaboration partner.

We decided to make sure that we have a tight link between the platform and the way we look, the visual identity. We put all of those tasks with one collaboration partner [...] and they have of course been involved in similar exercises and work for [companies such as] SKF, Sandvik, Atlas Copco, and so forth. (Brand & Marketing Director)

Other reasons for choosing to work with an external partner are limited internal resources and political reasons. Svärdenborn described the latter as ‘tricky’:

‘Political reasons’ is a tricky one, meaning that it is extremely difficult for us to be as blunt and open-minded in how we approach the organization when we are still part of Trelleborg, if you know what I mean. [...] So providing an outside-in perspective by a consultant who got skills and displayed, or demonstrated, and proven that in this field has been a great value. (Brand & Marketing Director)

Svärdenborn explained that before his superior and the CEO officially bought into the project, he had already started repositioning discussions with the external consulting company in order to be one step ahead in envisioning the project. The

following quotation illustrates that making the project outline tangible and business compatible was important for successfully buying-in.

I had a head start with BBDO [...] so when presenting to Patrik [Romberg] and to Peter [Nilsson] we had already progressed, not far but at least laying the foundations, and having visualized it so that it would become more tangible. In general my principle was: stay a couple of steps ahead of them, make it tangible, and link it to the business. Again, they need to be convinced, otherwise it won't happen. (Brand & Marketing Director)

Hugo Mann, the client director at BBDO, also highlighted the importance of having access to and convincing executive management for the change project to come:

That is something important to remember when it comes to this type of projects. This is a change process, a change project. It's not just a quick fix; it's not just a campaign that would run between the 1<sup>st</sup> of December and the 24<sup>th</sup> of December aiming to sell more Coca-Cola. This is actually something that aims to shift the brand into a slightly new direction compared to before. In the end this means, and that I know from experience, it's impossible to run a project like this if you don't have access to the top management. It doesn't mean that I need to have direct access to them; but in one or another way they need to be involved, otherwise it won't work, it's impossible. (Mann, External Brand Consultant)

Later, Svärdenborn and BBDO's client service director more clearly defined the project, its scope, envisioned outputs, cost estimations, and overall timing of projects.

#### *Marketing Council and Corporate Level Kick-Off Workshops, December 2011*

The repositioning project officially started during the second Marketing Council workshop, in December of 2011. The global brand and marketing director referred to this event as the first opportunity to speak about the project in a larger forum. Core activities and tasks during this internal repositioning event were group-based exercises to capture the key components in terms of strategic positioning, overall brand promise, strategic equities and key communication blocks including personality, verbal tonality, and look and feel. The following quotation illustrates how the need for this project was justified:

We had a big gap like 'this is how we want to be perceived as a brand in terms of image and positioning and this is the way we currently look'. There is a big gap between that, in general. When we look at it for the whole group, this is even worse. So we said OK, now as we sort of build on the current base and taking that one step forward, sharpening and strengthening it, how do we go about that? (Brand & Marketing Director)

Svärdenborn referred to the Marketing Council as "the perfect forum and group" with which to start the discussion and project during a two-day workshop. The goal was to create brand change advocates "that could help to pre-seed this idea with business unit presidents". The meeting took place in Trelleborg; besides regular participants, external consultants from the collaboration partner were invited. The

following quotation exemplifies the broad activities the workshop was supposed to cover:

We fully focused the two days on a brand workshop where we reviewed current and future brand associations for Trelleborg: what we believe are the key components for the value that we provide for customers, what is our competitive differentiation in terms of capabilities and solutions, and so forth. (Brand & Marketing Director)

The workshops included several exercises steered by the brand consultancy; for instance, regarding self-image and identity. The following quotation highlights the role of the consultants in facilitating the workshop:

We were planning this workshop for quite some time and developed a few different tools. We had a few different sessions, where we divided the group into smaller groups, asked them to perform some work together and address a few questions that we then discussed [...] We tried to cover questions of how the brand is regarded today, how they wanted to see the brand tomorrow. We used common methods like referring to cars, animals, or persons and then we summarized this in a compendium. This output partly served as the base for the research phase. (External Brand Consultant)

Some conclusions regarding self-image and identity showed self-perceptions of a leading authority but being “far too shy in terms of bragging or being clear” about it, not being ashamed, and being quite “happy and proud”. Regarding current position and communication, it was found that no “obvious creative concept” existed across the organization. Most material was found to be very “very descriptive” and “broad”. The business concept ‘seal, damp, and protect’ was perceived as a fundamental element; however, it needed to be supplemented, Svärdenborn explained.

Anders Broberg, representing one of business units from marketing side, described the recently established Marketing Council and second workshop as follows:

The Marketing Council is a marketing and branding community where we try to strengthen the Trelleborg brand as such. [...] During the second meeting in December, branding was discussed a lot and how Trelleborg wants to position itself for the future. They are looking for a new way of how to position the brand for the future. There is an external agency doing this job at the moment. We did some group work to find out how we see Trelleborg today. (Broberg, Sales & Marketing Director)

In parallel to kicking off the project during the second Marketing Council workshop, a corporate level workshop was initiated. This was based on Romberg’s idea to better integrate between various corporate level group functions (for example, CEO, Human Resources [HR], Investor Relations [IR], Strategy, etc.) and the various parts within the corporate communications team (for example, Brand and Marketing, Corporate Responsibility, Press Relations, etc.). The aim was to also cover “the more strategic- and business-minded perspective” as well as employer branding, and external and internal perspectives in general. Questions covered were: “What are the key issues that we believe that we need to be focusing on?”; ‘What are the main stakeholder groups?’; and ‘What’s the link between all of these communication issues

and target groups?', Svärdenborn explained. Thus, the corporate level workshop was "more broad-scale" compared to the parallel-run marketing council workshop, which placed "much more focusing on the commercial aspects". Both events (the initial Marketing Council workshop accompanied by an external brand consultancy, and the Corporate Level workshop) were described as key input sources for the whole project.

### *Brand Analysis Activities*

Once Svärdenborn had convinced superiors and the CEO, his intention was to create advocates that could help to pre-seed the brand change ideas with business unit presidents. One-to-one interviews, with 35 Trelleborg key executives (that is, business unit presidents) were the next activity in the repositioning process. Svärdenborn explained the rationale behind this choice in the following quotation:

When we started to do the interviews, they [business unit presidents] had already heard about the project and they felt that we were focusing on helping them to create more business growth. (Brand & Marketing Director)

The selection for interviewees was described as focusing heavily "on the business side", with business unit presidents and directors asking a few "tailored questions for each respondent depending on the role and the business", Svärdenborn explained. The following quotation provides an explanation as to why the executing agency was briefed to phrase the questions in a non-brand and marketing language.

The trick in those executive interviews was that the agency, compared to what they normally do in such interviews, didn't refer to creating a new platform about marketing. We skewed the questions to be much more about business instead, so it's all about growth and it's all about helping you win with your customers. 'Now, to do that we need to understand what you and your customers see, how do you compete in the global market place, where are you weak, etc.' (Brand & Marketing Director)

He further clarifies that the interview questions aimed at better understanding and describing what Trelleborg actually does, what makes it different from competition, what values Trelleborg offers to customers, how this value can best be described in functional and business terms, and how the corporate brand can communicatively support the businesses. Mann gave further insights as to why these management interviews were of such importance, offering two reasons: to better understand the businesses and their needs, and to create understanding and involvement early in the process.

It is important that you create an internal understanding for what you are doing, which means that the internal work that Stefan [Svärdenborn] needs to carry out becomes much easier, because people already from the beginning start to feel 'I know something is going on', 'I am involved', and 'I am part of this'. This means that the internal buy-in starts already from the beginning, actually from day one with the Marketing Council involvement. I have to say that Trelleborg has been very, very good in performing and creating this internal understanding during the whole process, but on the other hand it takes a lot of time, it's very, very time-consuming. (External Brand Consultant)

Another parallel activity to interviewing Trelleborg key executives was to review Trelleborg's current corporate positioning and communication elements (for example, promise, values, visual identity, corporate design and communication) and to assess visual "coherence and consistency in messaging", Svärdenborn explained. For this, "all Marketing Council members brought with them the key communication assets that they had for their units" so that they could discuss and assess them.

Competitor analysis and benchmarking on an overall level was another activity during this phase of the project. Results of desk-research selected competitors, and their communication efforts gave input to the repositioning process. Not having "a very detailed review" of the competitors' communication was a deliberate choice, Svärdenborn explained. Regarding operating with so many diversified businesses in so many competitive arenas, Svärdenborn explained that "it [was] really difficult to cover all corners; and it didn't". Only a few peer companies (competitors and customers) were scrutinized for brand analysis. Key conclusions drawn were that competitors, in general, focus more on functional features than on value-based and benefit-focused communication. The decentralized business structure, with many different types of customers, customer needs, and types of competitors, led the project team to focus on the identity aspects instead:

Out of the three Cs, 'company', 'competitors', and 'customers', it is the company aspect and the discussion on identity (who we are) and the knowledge that we have in the organization (what do customers really need and how do we sell products) that is a better, more reliable, and easier-to-tap-into source of valuable information [...] than competitors and customers are. If we would have less of a fragmented competitive situation and a more homogenous customer base, those would be much more important than they are today. (Brand & Marketing Director)

### *Creating a First Corporate Brand Position and Platform Draft*

In February 2012, the input from both events (that is, Marketing Council and Corporate Level workshops) as well as status quo analysis and business manager interviews, resulted in the creation of a first draft of a new corporate strategic positioning and brand platform. This took a lot of "discussions back and forth", taking a lot of time and involvement from different stakeholders internally: "A first draft [...] was reviewed with the people individually, to secure the applicability and twistability to other stakeholder groups", Svärdenborn explained. The brand &

marketing director explained that his choice to reduce the contact between brand consultants and executives to a minimum was due to Trelleborg's distinct culture:

It has been to a very little extent about putting the consultants in direct contact with the executives of Trelleborg. An exception was the interview phase and when we had Marketing Council meetings. The reason is simply Trelleborg's [...] particular and strong culture. It's so much about 'no nonsense, no consultant, and no fuzzy branding and marketing' type of culture. The risk of putting the agency in direct contact with them as part of the selling-in, as I would have done in other companies, would have been too high. It would have been the wrong approach in Trelleborg. (Brand & Marketing Director)

Instead of using customer input as the main source for creating a first draft of a new brand platform and position, the project team around Romberg and Svärdenborn decided to first base the construction of the platform on what the people involved felt was important, before letting current key customers assess and rate Trelleborg vis-à-vis competition.

Finding and narrowing down differentiators compared to other global industrial groups was mentioned as a key activity in the drafting process. Main "building blocks" or "cornerstones" to be viewed as "capabilities or deliverables" should bring "substance to the overall promise", Svärdenborn explained. Best-practice examples within the Trelleborg Group, like Sealing Solutions or Wheel Systems, were acting as role models in value-based communication. An intermediate brand assessment during the repositioning process revealed a good perception of Trelleborg's corporate brand foundation, but also the need to be supplemented and sharpened on the grounds of 'seal, damp, and protect'. Managers on both corporate and business levels considered the brand promise and position "a bit too functionally orientated, lacking the value and benefit aspect", Svärdenborn explained. Moreover, the current brand platform, promise and values did not fully build on Trelleborg's competitive strength in terms of polymer engineering, and applications expertise or on the business' focus and drive. The following quotation illustrates the need for the corporate brand platform to be designed as a hub that is useful for different stakeholders and essentially more supportive for individual business units.

Clearly and already from day one, the corporate brand platform needs to be a corporate brand platform that has relevance for different stakeholder groups. But naturally we have to play with the level of each of the components. (Brand & Marketing Director)

Svärdenborn used the term 'positioning fundamentals' when referring to the guidelines for a new value-based and value-focused communication. During these 'position drafting' activities needed to emphasize the strengths of the corporate brand Trelleborg "in terms of how are solutions better than competition to justify the price premium". At this stage of the process an idea for a new brand tagline emerged. This idea was then "pressure tested" on specific Trelleborg businesses such as infrastructure projects to test the new strategy's applicability.



Creating and shaping a new brand platform with updated and new content was another important activity revolving around the identification of three foundations:

What we have done so far is to identify three cornerstones: first, ‘who we are’ (what is it, in one sentence what we strive to be as a group); second, ‘what is it we promise’; third, how do we ‘deliver on that brand promise’ [...] Of course we have strived as much as possible and where relevant, to build fully on what we are today and what we are using today, which is successful. But we are adding some components and supplementing where we see the need. (Brand & Marketing Director)

While some elements of the brand platform were found to be universally relevant for standardized corporate brand communication, other “building blocks” needed to be customized. Business units and product areas were instructed to operate on two levels of communication: on the one hand, telling a story about the Trelleborg Group and its overall value aspects, and on the other hand presenting a more detailed value proposition for specific markets, segments, or customers. Discussing the need to better inform customers of a single Trelleborg entity about the Group’s entire diversity and significant role it plays in various areas of polymer engineering was another activity that emerged in the process of improving the way the Trelleborg brand should be utilized. This aspect reflects the goal to tell an overall corporate story about Trelleborg. The following quotation illustrates the importance of visualizations for the new Trelleborg digital showroom in delivering “a new Trelleborg look and feel”.

We have realized that it would be a good idea to make sure that we expose the customer to the full offering of the Trelleborg Group. That’s what we aimed to do with the digital showroom. [...] Taking the customer on a journey from space to seabed, and leveraging the most attractive, interesting and powerful products and solutions and applications where we as a group play a significant role. (Brand & Marketing Director)

Utilizing the corporate brand platform as positioning guidance for customized stakeholder communication was another aim and project stream. Stakeholders are referred to as customers and potential customers, employees and potential employees, shareholders and investors, society in general, and media, as well as business partners, including suppliers. Each stakeholder perspective needed to be captured and linked to the platform with “tailored key messages”. For example, “What is it that we would like customers to think and feel in relation to Trelleborg, and what are the most relevant aspects for them?”, Svärdenborn explained. In terms of visual brand identity, the overall agreement, as Svärdenborn summarized, was that the project team found Trelleborg to be in need of becoming “much more aligned and integrated across stakeholder groups”. Based on the brand platform, an updated visual identity was idealized, and included revisiting brand strategy documents and a new creative concept as the basis for communication campaigns. Securing the consistent use of the branding guidelines once the new strategic positioning and corporate brand platform for Trelleborg Group are launched on an overall level was assessed as important. The

project team started to establish principles and guidelines to secure that the changes trickle down in the organization in order to “eventually run like a recurring theme through everything” Trelleborg does on a business-unit level, Svärdenborn explained. Richard Hepworth, BU president of marine systems and member of the Marketing Council, described how he envisioned the strategy to work and to be implemented:

I think the brand at the corporate level is aspirational and supporting, [...] then you got the business positionings, and then you got the sales people going out with a value proposition but of course, all, and that’s the point, got to support it. So I think the ultimate thing is to have a strong value proposition because that’s what wins you the whole marketing process as it is geared around winning more orders, more work, more business. So the business brand and then the group brand all need to be aligned and supporting the value proposition and that’s where we probably got the weakness in the past, where business brands aren’t there and the Trelleborg brand is too far away or not well-enough defined to support the value proposition. (Managing Director, Marine Systems BU)

#### *Global Management Conference, March 2012*

On the occasion of Trelleborg’s annual Global Management Conference, the global brand and marketing director introduced some of the initial project’s results in terms of “new value-based messages” and “a more contemporary visual identity”, as part of his main presentation on Trelleborg’s digital strategy and online presence. The following quotation illustrates how this attempt sparked interest among Trelleborg’s top managers and also increased the CEO’s involvement:

This was also when Peter [Nilsson, CEO] said for the first time on stage: ‘fine, so people are asking me about this and when are we going to launch this digital initiatives and this new platform for Trelleborg’. We agreed to do that when we have something else important to talk about, which is the Capital Markets Day. (Brand & Marketing Director)

Even if the CEO was already partly involved in the process since the beginning of 2012, to fully involve him in the repositioning process after the global management conference was another thorough choice:

It was actually after the management meeting, because it was a deliberate choice not to talk too much about it in detail at the global management conference. We had a lot of things we wanted to cover and we built-in some of the key building blocks from the new positioning and the corporate brand platform. But it was at too early a stage to fully review and discuss it with Peter [Nilsson]. (Brand & Marketing Director)

The goal was to first allocate “a lot of substance from all the collaboration in the organization” so as to not let the CEO “jump on a personal opinion”, grounding it on “what business and people are saying” instead, along with the changed organizational structure due to the pending joint venture, Svärdenborn explained:

He needed to absorb it step-by-step and gain confidence that this is something that is needed, has an impact, and that people will like. [...] And that involves how we are now re-focusing our structure and our efforts towards some partly new but also existing growth segments. That's one pillar that he wants to clarify. Of course, the organizational structure behind that is sort of the proof. (Brand & Marketing Director)

A choice was made not to include BA presidents too early in the process. The goal was to include them once the material was in a better state to be discussed with them:

The reason for not including them earlier is that so many of them sit as divisional presidents on a business that is not very well defined and is pointing in all directions. So business area presidents are caught in-between the helicopter perspective and the close-to-the-customer business perspective. So they are probably the ones that have the least input to give when it comes to the overall group positioning. (Brand & Marketing Director)

Another activity was testing new brand promise and value communication material and its linguistic impact on the business area presidents. There was a need for clarifying “when we can explicitly use which words” in order to reach “our target groups”, Svärdenborn explained.

After the Global Management Conference, the repositioning process is referred to as including even more discussions to take the project to the next level. A Brand Board and Marketing Council meeting was to be held before the summer, to get the project's status reviewed and fine-tuned. However, these meetings were postponed due to the executive management team becoming increasingly involved in the process and asking for adjustments:

We started presenting this for executive management and got their input. They got so absorbed into that process and really wanted to first decide what is overall right or wrong and needs adjustment before running it by Brand Board. We then decided to have the Brand Board meeting after the OGM meeting, in June. (Brand & Marketing Director)

Additional reasons for postponing further activities and decisions of “building up the story of future Trelleborg” were referenced to the delay of finalizing the TrelleborgVibracoustic JV. Another aim was delayed: that of utilizing the corporate brand platform as positioning guidance for customized stakeholder communication, as a management team had “so much detailed input to give” and was “unused to working with this type of tasks”, Svärdenborn explained. This resulted in continuous buy-in attempts and discussions in many boards, which eventually decelerated parts of the overall process.

### *Operational Group Management (OGM) Meeting, June 2012*

The head of corporate communications presented the latest version of the repositioning project to the OGM at a meeting in June of 2012. During this meeting, the overall platform was decided upon and approved by Trelleborg's executive committee. What remained to be done was to revise some of the chosen capability phrasings, to propose a different tagline, to have more options for communication platform directions, and to draft additional potential campaign themes, Svärdenborn explained. It was then decided to receive further input from the Brand Board and OGM at their next meeting, which eventually took place at the end of September, 2012. Some business-level managers involved in the process found the slowing down of the process of finalizing, along with agreeing upon all repositioning elements, quite controversial:

It concerns me a little bit that we fine tune some [aspects] where we spend a lot of time and I guess a lot of money and resources, and experts and marketing agencies, and copywriters, and things like that. And the final choice seems to be a wordsmith by business people, directors of the business, let's say who aren't really marketing experts, they just got preference for this word instead of that word. That concerns me, that we not dilute the good work that's been done by the marketing people and dilute with preference from, let's call it, non-experts. (Managing Director, Marine Systems BU)

### *Brand Board and OGM Meeting, September 2012*

During these two meetings, the way of moving the process forward was agreed upon, Svärdenborn explained. The decision was to "stick to the phrasing in terms of the way we want to position" Trelleborg but change the linguistic self-portrayal from "a global engineering group" to a much braver "world leader in engineered polymer solutions". Svärdenborn clarified that further efforts were made to capture essential equities to be used for future communication initiatives; this was done by adding "more edge to some of the phrasings". The number of equity building blocks, supposed to give credibility and balance to the more aspirational parts of brand positioning statement and promise, remained the same. The following quotation illustrates the goal to improve benefit-oriented communication based on the new platform and position:

We decided to put more focus on innovative-engineered solutions than just innovation, but still talking about seal, damp, and protect critical applications. That's where we can excel, can charge a price premium, and where the customer can count on us as the best partner. And focusing even more on how our high quality seal, damp, and protect capabilities let the customer accelerate their performance from a business point of view in a sustainable manner. (Brand & Marketing Director)

These changes, first agreed upon by the Brand Board, were then signed-off by group management at the following OGM. Table 13 illustrates Trelleborg's new value-based positioning strategy (Trelleborg Brand Book, unpublished internal document).

**Table 13**

## Trelleborg's new value-based positioning strategy

<b>Strategic positioning</b>	Trelleborg is a world-leader in engineered polymer solutions		
<b>Overall promise</b>	We seal, damp and protect critical applications in demanding environments.		
<b>Functional benefit and business value</b>	Our innovative-engineered solutions accelerate performance for our customers in a sustainable way.		
<b>Universally relevant, standardized strategic equities</b>	Polymer engineering	Local presence, global reach	
<b>Business focused, adapted strategic equities</b>	Applications expertise	Customer integration	Business accelerator

A remaining question concerned how to adapt and link the material to various business units and market segments. In order to do this, Trelleborg Offshore was selected as a pilot segment to test the idea of positioning an entire segment towards different customers on the back of the overall strategic positioning and brand platform project:

Offshore is a key segment for us. We supply offshore, oil, and gas solutions from many different entities in Trelleborg. So far we haven't had a good connection between what they say individually and how we would like to position ourselves holistically towards the 'offshore, oil, and gas industry'. There also hasn't been a link to the corporate brand platform and positioning. So we are now taking the project to mid-level. We will pull all entities providing solutions to the offshore, oil, and gas industry into a project to unify how we will position ourselves towards this industry. (Brand & Marketing Director)

Assuming this pilot event to be successful, further activities were planned to start implementing these ideas "not only at fairs and exhibitions, but also in terms of all other types of communication channels for Trelleborg", the global brand director explained. This needs the involvement of different organizational levels to perform "better than before in gluing together the different entities and segments with the corporation Trelleborg". First, this requires an inside-out approach of engaging Trelleborg BUs to work on how to connect with the overall brand positioning and platform, and how the company envisions the implementation of the project. Then, an outside-in approach of looking at planned implementations from a customer value and customer group perspective is mentioned as a project that will run in parallel to better understand "what the relevant aspects for each of these [target groups] are", Svärdenborn explained.

While Brand Board and OGM eventually agreed upon the brand platform, they asked for a better phrasing of the new tagline. Being confronted with the executives' power and influence in the finalization process of the project, the operational project team needed "to safeguard [...] the same type of close connection" between a new tagline proposal and the communications platform, according to Svärdenborn. In

terms of visual changes to create a modernized look and feel, a new 3D polymer logo (Figure 20) was developed and presented to emphasize Trelleborg's core expertise.



**Figure 20**

New Trelleborg logo

The overall visual aim was to create a “more impactful imagery” to be applied to any sort of templates, whether Group- or BA-level. These template changes were also tested on existing campaigns from Sealing Solutions and Wheel Systems BAs, “to demonstrate the positive impact of a strengthened group branding and visual alignment”, Svärdenborn further explained.

A parallel project to developing a new graphical identity, and look and feel for Trelleborg was the creation of a digital showroom providing insights into the wide range of products and solutions Trelleborg has to offer. The BBDO client director explained that this was important in telling a sharpened corporate story:

[The digital showroom] creates a completely different brand, stronger and more powerful. It also shows the diverse competence in the brand and that they have a lot of resources. We wanted to tell a complete story that creates an understanding for all Trelleborg, and not just these different business areas or islands. (External Brand Consultant)

Reflecting upon the course of the process, Svärdenborn believes that initially rolling-out the project on corporate level was a great gain. Yet, the following quotation exemplifies the rather slow internal decision processes of political dimensions:

Clearly, if the car is rolling in that direction we won't pull the breaks and back up again. It's just a matter of how and when we do the rest. If we have had a management team with more maturity in the branding field and if I have had a bigger mandate, that would not be the model we would choose. But now that's the way the world looks, so we need to make the best out of the situation. [...] We are working extremely hard with the internal anchoring [...] It is a process that needs to take place in steps and requires a lot of political massaging and tweaking. (Brand & Marketing Director)

Mann aptly summarized the challenging role of his client's main contact person to steer a corporate brand positioning change process in a balanced way:

Stefan [Svärdenborn] – like many persons in his position – has the challenge to face our arguments and what we bring to the table. He also has to face the arguments and comments of his organization, and he needs to balance and deal with that. (External Brand Consultant)

*Marketing Council, October 2012*

The decision to call another Marketing Council “pre-alignment” meeting before internal rollout was based on the rationale of making sure that the latest input from businesses was gathered. The goal was then to utilize the new positioning strategy to translate into first communication parts, initially at the Capital Markets Day, in December of 2012. Moreover, changes to the brand position outline were still not completely approved by group management, and this waiting time needed to be utilized effectively. Susanna Schneeberger, VP of marketing at TIS and member of Brand Board and Marketing Council saw the decision of holding yet another workshop as an “emergency solution”. Finalizing the project earlier would have been better to “really take advantage of it”, she added. Essentially, the Trelleborg CEO needed to be comfortable, because eventually “it’s always him taking the decision, and he needs to be comfortable with it”, she explained.

Key business-level employees, as well as corporate communications and external marketing consultants who were involved in co-developing this project, were present at the two-day workshop held at Trelleborg’s headquarter. Observations and informal conversations provided insights into the dynamics of internal brand positioning activities. An external consultant referred to the project as a long process. Some organizational members were very reluctant to the changes, while others were more positive and proactive. An external consultant referred to the project’s status being the same as before the summer. Several rounds of management buy-in slowed down the process; the rather long process is also explained by the high involvement of business level, considered unusually high compared to other brand consulting projects.

Focusing the workshop discussion on the corporate brand positioning project, Svärdenborn, as workshop leader, reviewed the ambition of the project: to strengthen and revitalize the Trelleborg brand with a stronger proposition. In a discussion with participants, it was emphasized that the corporate brand should leverage and tap full potential. Evolution, rather than revolution, was stressed when referring to the process of strengthening positioning through an increased focus on customer value-creation processes. Visuals were referred to as “bringing to life” what the words try to convey.

Part of the workshop was a group discussion organized by the external consultants. The group-work session revolved around the brand platform and securing integration in respective business units. Small teams were formed to discuss the task. Observing

one group and their discussions, most content overlaps were seen with the TSS business area, while other business areas see the opportunity to use the new material as soon as possible, as a proper branding foundation is lacking. The discussion mostly revolved around best practices from business units and how the corporate brand positioning process could create fit across the Trelleborg Group. However, not everyone can fully relate to each proposition. Participants raise issues of alignment and fit as the various entities differ. More alignment is needed, but it should not “kill creativity”, as one participant mentioned. Concerns were raised in that the new logo would not fit some BAs due its dark colors. Consistent imagery was referred to as the biggest challenge for all Trelleborg entities, and “a high level group imagery would be a good start”, another participant proposed. The workshop concluded with another task that asked participants brainstorm a potential new tagline for Trelleborg that summarized and captured the brand platform in a good way. The workshop then closed with participants gathering and exchanging ideas, while Corporate Communications and external agency participants wrapped up the event and set future decision milestones.

BBDO’s client service director highlighted that one should not underestimate the time and preparation needed to perform things like marketing council meetings, conduct interviews, and to create buy-in and understanding. This is very often almost half-the-purpose, he added. The following quotation demonstrates that a corporate-level positioning process could have been finalized quite quickly, by abstracting the numerous buy-in attempts on multiple levels.

If I would sit down with Stefan [Svärdenborn] and Patrik [Romberg] in a closed room for one day, talking about challenges and about the brand, I am sure by the end of the day 80 percent could be possibly covered from what we have learned by performing all the interviews. So there could be a quicker way of doing things, which would mean less hours spent, but you would have many more difficulties creating the understanding internally, creating this support and buy-in, and it’s essential of course that the buy-in is created and that the things we develop are liked; especially among Swedish companies where the buy-in is created on consensus, rather than with power. (External Brand Consultant)

However, these numerous attempts to reach consensus were also seen as counterproductive:

With all due respect, it’s all done in a Swedish consensual way and everybody has a say and another say, and another say, and then you make a decision; and that decision is just a [trigger] for another decision or discussion. I think at some point somebody may need to say, ‘hang on, this is what we are going to do, final, nothing changes now’. That’s my only concern with the work that has been done in the background. It’s excellent in terms of the brand, the strategic propositions and all the equities – really good. But I hope the visual identity, the tagline and things like that don’t get diluted about too many compromises and attempts to keep everybody happy, because you can never keep everybody happy. (Managing Director, Marine Systems BU)



Robert Zahiri, TSS' global marketing and communications director, stressed that these time-consuming developments, with many compromises, could result in quite generic (in other words, not desirable) position outcomes:

On group level, of course, the danger is always to please everyone. If you compromise with all the BA's and BU's by considering everyone's opinion, the result can be something quite general and common, which has no real unique and sharp profile to it. [...] You could even ask, 'well, couldn't this be a bit sharper or even more unique', and maybe this is also the main challenge on group level, to find something that is substantial, that is true, it cannot be a fantasy statement, of course. (Zahiri, Global Marketing & Communications Director TSS)

### *Brand Position Implementation*

The final strategy elements were aligned with the brand board and group executive management in December of 2012. Svärdenborn explained that at this point in time the platform was finalized, and it was more about moving from high-level fundamentals down to different stakeholder group, business unit, and geographies adaptation. In parallel to the brand position and platform project, other projects were moving forward, including the brand digitalization project with 'The world of Trelleborg' online showroom and marketing training workshops to educate regarding Trelleborg's use of digital channels, enabling marketing excellence across the group.

The *Capital Markets Day*, in December of 2012, was the first external communications point for delivering the updated brand position. The goal was to utilize the scene to let the CEO tell a sharpened and visionary Trelleborg story instead of just saying, "we are launching a new brand and communications platform". Svärdenborn further explained that the Capital Markets Day "proved to be instrumental in creating what is in Trelleborg terms still quite a dramatic and rapid progress". The first external event resulted in satisfied and convinced internal and external stakeholders:

The business area presidents saw the extremely positive reception, and the members of the media and press also reacted very positively, like 'wow, this is a really new and more progressive Trelleborg'. They were both very much in favor of the new updated visual identity and the more value-creation-based role of the company and positioning. They did very much buy-in to it. (Brand & Marketing Director)

Trelleborg's brand & marketing director highlighted an increase in stock price "ever since". Moreover, internal and external stakeholders were also positive towards the digital initiatives, including the 'World of Trelleborg' online showroom and the various types of interactive tools and applications aiming to make it easier for customers to work with Trelleborg.

As for *marketing education*, training pilot workshops had already taken place in November of 2012. In January and March of 2013 the first two 'real' marketing training sessions were conducted. These training sessions focused on 100 of the

group's top managers, taking them through a two-and-a-half day course in strategic marketing. Svärdenborn designed the course together with a professional marketing institute, having the key goal of linking digital marketing knowledge and branding expertise. Trelleborg's target groups were managing directors, business unit presidents, commercial directors that have combined sales and marketing positions, sales and marketing directors, and also key group staff functions. The following quotation illustrates the importance of this education course for successful brand position implementation outcomes.

We are combining basic marketing understanding and abilities among managers with infusing brand platform messages into their minds [...] That has been one of the most important implementation elements, because it has really lifted the whole initiative. From 'yeah, this is nice corporate stuff and it looks great, it sounds great, and of course I will use it' – you never know – to actually having hands-on discussions of relevance [...] asking questions like 'what does increased customer centricity and value creation mean to you', 'what are the big opportunities', and 'how does the corporate brand fill an important role in your value proposition?' (Brand & Marketing Director)

The strategic choice to educate BU presidents and directors in the latest marketing knowledge was a way to secure understanding and correct implementation of an updated corporate brand position. This "pushed them to actively start thinking about things like value centricity, value creation and benefits from a strong corporate brand [...] not giving them the option to say whether they like this or not [...] because it will help to create growth", Svärdenborn explained. A tactical approach to ensure commitment was that Romberg, Svärdenborn, and his team could refer back to the top management interviews conducted during the research stage of the project. At least three quarters of those who participated in the strategic marketing training had been interviewed before. The project team argued that their input "has now helped to create a much sharper positioning", as explained by Svärdenborn.

Meanwhile, the *multi-stakeholder adaptation* and implementation of the platform based on workshops progressed. Brand position changes were, for example, aligned from an HR stakeholder perspective. Moreover, stakeholder adaptation was developed in parallel to upgrading the Trelleborg corporate websites.

In March of 2013, Romberg and Svärdenborn presented the full communications toolbox and the full story behind the brand platform to the Group's top 100 managers, at the annual *Global Management Conference*. Svärdenborn referred to this event as the "big internal rollout", making the finalized brand position changes visible to the entire top management:

It was the first time that most of the managers saw the new visual identity, got the new positioning of the group, the new value-based promise, saw a lot of either finalized communication elements or the tool kit that was to come [...] The conference was the ‘big bang’ thing, very successful, very well received: how to sharpen and strengthen the brand going forward as part of the group strategy, [...] as well as the whole strategic rationale behind what we want to achieve, how, and why. (Brand & Marketing Director)

The success at the Capital Markets Day also made it easier to communicate the strategic changes in brand position. However, a still unsolved brand tagline decision was an unsuccessful stream of the project. The following quotation gives insights into how the project leaders tried to sell-in an updated tagline proposal developed by BBDO and yet another brand consultancy company:

We combined [proposals from BBDO and IAS] and gave it a final chance with OGM. But that was one of the elements of difficulty for them to agree on and where their lack of perspective and experience in this field, to be quite honest, made us park that question. Because they did not fully realize, appreciate, and agree on what a tagline is all about, what is it supposed to do, and how do we make it sufficiently high level aspirational and inspirational and flexible, whilst at the same time focusing on what defines our arena and states what we aim to do differently compared to competition in terms of value creation. I think we had the perfect option [...] but some battles you win and some you lose. (Brand & Marketing Director)

As mentioned earlier, as part of the repositioning process, a new visual brand identity was developed, to emphasize Trelleborg’s core expertise in polymer engineering, create a modernized look and feel, and convey an updated brand position. Trying this new design on existing campaigns from some business areas, the goal was to test the impact of a new “powerful imagery”, Svärdenborn explained. At the *Hanover Industry Fair*, the world’s biggest industrial fair covering all areas of industrial technology, TSS presented, at their booth, the new visual identity and logotype, in combination with current campaigns (April, 2013). The anthracite-colored 3D-logo was presented together with the business areas’ lighter colors (mostly white and turquoise) and futuristic design elements.

Talking with TSS representatives revealed a positive perception of the new logo. Yet, it is seen as a big change compared to the previously used ‘no color’ background. Diverse templates are being changed to the new visual identity as well, but in a gradual process and using material that is still in stock. The brand is referred to as important in sales and customer interactions; customers are turning to TSS when the challenge to find a solution for a problem is big and long-term. The value-oriented and benefit-adding aspect of the new Trelleborg positioning strategy is supported by the point that many TSS innovations are jointly developed with customers, as explained by a TSS representative.

At the *Offshore Technology Conference (OTC)* in Houston, Texas (May, 2013), Trelleborg presented the results of “joining forces” across all offshore-related entities,

with the group to 'go public' with a pilot campaign for a total segment proposition. Svärdenborn referred to this event as "the first time where we as a group really joined forces across organizational entities that all have something to offer to the offshore, oil and gas market [...], clustering our products and solutions to face the market under one umbrella".

Since summer of 2013, the main focus has been on *business level implementation* by utilizing workshops, discussions, meetings, and project streams with selected BUs. Implementation means linking each individual business-unit's proposition and positioning to the overall group positioning, and at the same time linking and sharpening this proposition and overall positioning to specific industries or market segments. Svärdenborn explained that this is an element that "has been missing a bit before". He developed his thoughts further by explaining that first, some businesses "have not been totally clear about how they position themselves in the global market place"; second, not all were entirely sure what exactly "differentiates them from competition"; and third, knowing "the value beyond functional performance they are offering customers" has been unclear or has not been expressed.

Considering the immense number of business units and product areas, as well as limited resources, project responsables needed to prioritize where to start with the implementation. The unit prioritization decision was based on two factors, as respondents revealed: starting with units that are strategically important, and selecting units that were less marketing-advanced. Five units were initially selected. Selecting and prioritizing units that are less marketing- and branding-advanced also clarifies that some units need more guidance and aid than others in regard to how to apply the strategic changes. Schneeberger illustrated this point in the following quotation:

If you say do this and this, people will do it; it will happen. But if you just write 'we have a nice new brand platform, you need to align all your communication and material and how you communicate with customers to sell your products and position yourself in the market', it would be like a question mark for people in many parts of the organization; they wouldn't be able to know what to do. (Schneeberger, Marketing & Sales Director, TIS)

Svärdenborn stressed that his team is also staying "fairly close to the rest", but will be "lagging behind a bit". As for the selected pilot implementation units, Trelleborg decided to work with an external collaboration partner again. This time, the partner is the UK-based brand agency IAS, who had been working with the Trelleborg Marine Systems BU before. Svärdenborn explained that in a group like Trelleborg, with many different products in many different areas, one needs "to work with different consultants". He reasoned that another agency (IAS) would be more suitable for the implementation part of the positioning process; this is due to their core competency and the track record they already have with some Trelleborg business units.

## ***Brand Positioning Outcomes***

A major outcome of this repositioning episode is an increased understanding of brand significance based on company-wide marketing and brand networks. Through a company-wide change project, a new brand position statement and platform was created. The repositioning process also generated a new visual identity and logo, customized communication elements for corporate and business-level use, a new brand position tool kit, updated brand policy documents, e-learning tools on the brand platform and positioning, and corporate-, segment-, and business-level implementation campaigns. Creating an online and offline showroom ('World of Trelleborg') was another outcome from a brand digitalization project that was developed hand-in-hand with the repositioning strategy. Finally, the recent episode arranged for an increase in corporate branding personnel, signaling the increasing importance of this function.

## ***Brand Positioning Challenges***

This episode highlights the challenge of guiding change without having a direct mandate to push it through. In the following quotation, Svärdenborn reflects upon his role as a project leader and change agent.

My assignment and function is about steering, inspiring, driving the marketing directors. That is smack in the middle of what I need to do to accomplish a strengthened brand and accelerate marketing and digital. Brand Board and Marketing Council [...] are in fact key elements in steering and driving the marketing directors, the 'weak dotted line'. But there is no real functional reporting into us. Whether that will in the future happen or not is a big question mark. (Brand & Marketing Director)

Table 14 summarizes empirical findings during episodes two at corporate level.

**Table 14**

## Summary of empirical findings during episode two

Drivers	Action	Outcomes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improving corporate brand management</li> <li>- Recent JV changing company structure</li> <li>- Digital developments forcing companies to be transparent</li> <li>- Filling gaps from previous branding efforts</li> <li>- Improving branding coordination between corporate and BU levels</li> <li>- Changing brand perception from 'functional solutions provider' to 'value-adding and benefit-adding brand'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pitching for project internally</li> <li>- Hiring external brand consultancy</li> <li>- Organizing self-image and identity exercises during kick-off workshop</li> <li>- Reviewing current branding material</li> <li>- Interviewing BU key executives</li> <li>- Analyzing competitors and benchmarking</li> <li>- Finding corporate brand differentiators for intended position formulation</li> <li>- Creating guidelines for new value-based communication</li> <li>- Drafting new brand platform and position with updated and new content</li> <li>- Producing standardized (universally relevant) and customized (business-specific) brand position elements</li> <li>- Introducing initial project results at management conference to spark interest</li> <li>- Deciding to fully involve CEO once enough substance was allocated from BUs</li> <li>- Testing new strategy and its linguistic impact on BA presidents</li> <li>- Refining essential brand platform and position elements</li> <li>- Selecting pilot segments to test new ideas</li> <li>- Developing new visual identity to create modernized look and feel</li> <li>- Conducting further workshops to gather input from businesses</li> <li>- Aligning final strategy elements with CEO and executive management</li> <li>- Running strategic marketing training to facilitate implementation</li> <li>- Working with BUs in workshop format to link their proposition to overall group</li> <li>- Prioritizing BUs that are strategically important and less marketing-advanced</li> <li>- Collaborating with different brand consultancy to facilitate BU implementation</li> <li>- Adapting platform and position implementation to specific stakeholder groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased integration through brand networks</li> <li>- New brand position statement and platform</li> <li>- New visual identity and logo</li> <li>- Customized communication elements for corporate and BU levels</li> <li>- Updated brand policy documents</li> <li>- 'World of Trelleborg' digital showroom</li> <li>- E-learning tools on branding</li> <li>- Corporate, segment, and BU-level campaigns</li> <li>- Positioning guidance for customized stakeholder communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Linking group position and brand platform with BU and PA positioning efforts</li> <li>- Convincing and engaging non-brand knowledgeable managers</li> <li>- Continuous CEO and executive management buy-in</li> <li>- Managing different levels of pace due to multiple stakeholder involvement</li> <li>- Successfully repositioning despite lack of resources and branding capabilities</li> <li>- Finding balance between central (push) and decentralized (pull) actions</li> <li>- Overcoming long-established mindsets to create engagement</li> <li>- Considering differently driven BUs and unevenly distributed branding capabilities</li> <li>- Improving cross-collaboration thereby reducing 'silo thinking'</li> <li>- Securing BU utilization and alignment with brand changes</li> </ul>

# Brand Positioning at Business Level

## *Trelleborg Sealing Solutions Kalmar*

Trelleborg Sealing Solutions Kalmar AB was founded in 1988 under the name Rubore AB. The entrepreneur Percy Josefsson began to experiment with the production of brake shims for passenger cars. Initial attempts were conducted in the kitchen oven at his villa in the southern Swedish city of Kalmar (Trelleborg Press Release, 2013). In 1992, Trelleborg acquired the company, which was integrated into the Trelleborg portfolio. When Trelleborg acquired Rubore, 30 employees were working for the company; today, it employs approximately 200 people. The company mainly manufactures brake shims, using thin rubber foils vulcanized to steel to prevent squealing car brakes. Today, the company's official name is Trelleborg Sealing Solutions Kalmar AB, and it operates as part of the TSS division. Until recently, it had been part of the automotive division, which ceased due to the TrelleborgVibracoustic JV.

The company describes itself as a world leader in the production and development of brake noise (with focus on Rubore product brand) and vibration damping (with focus on Trelleborg corporate brand) solutions, mainly for the automotive industry. The BU's overall business concept is to provide customers with tailor-made solutions rather than standardized products. This case exemplifies Trelleborg's strategy to run its business in a decentralized and entrepreneurial manner, while increasing an overall approach by means of corporate branding activities. Plant Manager Ulf Johansson underlined that the corporate tradition of running decentralized businesses leaves the existing company culture intact, but makes most people also wonder if one should be prouder of working for Rubore or for Trelleborg. However, he also highlights the importance of being part of Trelleborg. Due to its signaling effect of financial strength, being part of Trelleborg is an advantage:

It's important to have a strong group. Then it's also easier to get the best terms when it comes to payment and price, absolutely. And of course in that respect, Trelleborg is much more known in public than Rubore. (Johansson, Plant Manager)

The importance of the Trelleborg corporate brand increases even more when looking outside the traditional Rubore brake shim products: "When it comes to other products [...] it becomes maybe more important to be Trelleborg", Johansson explained. As emphasized above, Sealing Solutions Kalmar AB's main products are shims, accounting for almost 90 percent of its turnover. However, considerable achievements have been accomplished in the sound damping of engine and chassis parts for the automotive OEM and industrial markets. Understanding the history of the traditional shim business and the more recently developed lamination business is important for exploring the interplay between corporate brand positioning and

businesses-level brand positioning. In line with the corporate-level brand positioning strategy, the BU stresses its self-image of being a ‘solutioneer’:

We are not trying to sell a product that we don’t believe to work. We are not trying to sell a piece of material, we try to sell a solution [...] That’s the image we like to see ourselves, to be a ‘solutioneer’ not a material provider. Saying that, it takes a lot to deliver and we have to put a lot of resources to that. Sometimes I feel that we are not always as linked to that as we would like to see ourselves. (Norberg, Product Manager)

Arvid Norberg is the product manager for NVH laminates, the ‘second leg’ of the BU. He highlighted that it is more important for him to be associated with Trelleborg than with the Rubore heritage. The following quotation underpins the complex relationship between Trelleborg corporate brand and product areas; it illuminates a twofold strategy, in which the daughter brand Rubore is more important for the older and mature markets (such as Europe and US), while Trelleborg, as a mother brand, is more useful to enter emerging markets (such as Asia):

For me, working on the laminate side, it’s more important to say I belong to Trelleborg, it’s a Trelleborg company. This is because I deal more with car and engine manufacturers, and those people know Trelleborg but they don’t know Rubore. Rubore was the company in the beginning, now it’s not the company name any longer but still a product name for the shims. (Product Manager)

Initially, BU management tried to brand the non-brake-shim-related products as Rubore. This strategy, however, proved to be unsuccessful, as many people believe that “Rubore doesn’t say anything”, Johansson explained. It was decided, then, to brand such products with Trelleborg instead. Both product lines and solutions, however, are based on the same technology, operating through the same production process, and intend to be positioned as the same high-end quality supplier:

That is something inherited from the shim side. The product I have is using the same production process. The material is basically the same but it applies to different areas. [...] If you compare us with our competitors, we have a different way of how we ‘sandwich’ material. We use high quality rubber in dry condition and foil. In many aspects we have a much better material than [the] competition has, in terms of durability, formability, and these things. We are taking this to the new area, where we use the same type of material. We are perceived as best-in-class when it comes to customer and technical support, but we are also seen to be expensive, charging a premium (Product Manager).

Stefan Lundström, managing director and BU president, summarized that people associate Rubore with good quality and service, but at higher costs when compared to the competition. Figure 21 illustrates the Rubore heritage logo.



# Rubore®

## **Figure 21**

Rubore heritage logo

### ***Business Context***

Today, Trelleborg Sealing Solutions Kalmar is one of the world's biggest shim producers, with products installed in passenger car and commercial vehicle brake systems globally. The requirements for noise damping solutions in automotive OEM, OES, and After Market brake systems, and lately in other automotive and industrial applications, increase annually, respondents revealed. The three biggest global competitors are Wolverine, MSC, and Meneta. Johansson explained how competition and market positions developed over the years:

I think we are still the strongest, at least within the OEM field. Competition is really not a bad thing for us, because from time to time, and for political reasons, customers choose others that are not so good and then they get problems with warranty claims and all these things. Of course, the car companies are not interested in paying millions and millions of dollars in warranty claims compared to paying a few more dimes on the product itself. So the more problems they had on the market, the more we could show that we come up with a solution. (Plant Manager)

The 250 million brake shims produced annually are delivered to all key manufacturers of disc brakes and brake linings. End customers include practically all car manufacturers in the market. However, the market conditions of a mature industry can also present challenges, as the following quotation illustrates:

There are, of course, market influences that will change, as with any mature industry. I mean, we are earning a lot of money but our customers don't. So there is always a fear of loosing. But from my point of view we should continue to be the strongest technical solution. (Plant Manager)

### ***Brand Positioning Drivers***

Besides being driven to continue to be the strongest technical solution provider, the Trelleborg – Rubore example highlights how corporate brand strategy and positioning guidelines are integrated on BU and product area level, accompanied by potential tensions that might arise. Anders Broberg, director of sales and marketing,

explained how Trelleborg's the initiatives from corporate-level brand strategy formation triggered an internal campaign to defend and keep the business unit's Rubore brand as a daughter brand in the Trelleborg portfolio. The following quotation illustrates the necessity of this campaign in order to eventually strengthen the position of Rubore.

When we lost the Rubore name in our communication, we applied for the Rubore brand name as a daughter brand. I asked myself 'how to position us' and 'how to deal with this'. All our customers know us as Rubore rather than Trelleborg. So the Rubore name has been very important for us to keep and to use. Everyone here is still using it on the shim side, which is 90 percent of our business. [...] Therefore, I started a small campaign to get the Rubore brand accepted. That was not easy. We have heard it throughout the years, not to use the name, so we tried to sell it in to Trelleborg. [...] It went all the way up to Peter Nilsson [CEO] and finally got accepted. (Broberg, Sales & Marketing Director)

Lundström, also referred to the controversies about brand naming when while elaborating upon his relationship to brand-related aspects in his work. "We have been fighting quite hard to get Rubore accepted as a brand name for shims", he revealed. Moreover, Lundström believes that the Trelleborg brand and certain daughter brands like Rubore are valuable organizational resources, being of high "value for the customers". The following quotation illustrates the relation between mother and daughter brand:

From my perspective, you decide to brand a name and normally you build that up through years of historical values you have delivered. In our case, for US and Europe, it's Rubore, which is the brand, as our customers always refer to Rubore. But for other products in the group it could be Trelleborg, which is the brand based on history. So I don't see any interference between Trelleborg and Rubore. Trelleborg is the mother company and the company who owns the brand Rubore. It's normal that a group has a lot of different brands. (Lundström, Managing Director)

The managing director also thinks that it is "very difficult to change a brand", and that it does not make sense to "suddenly call our shims Trelleborg"; it needs to make sense for the customer, he continued. The following quotation illuminates the importance of creating trust and loyalty over time through building on history:

If you take an engineer to the customer, he has been working with our shims for 10, 15, 20 years and he knows, when I get a product from Rubore, they have always treated me well. If I get that from a competitor, I know I will have problems. So we have already established this. (Managing Director)

The importance of track record and proving one's position and expertise over time is key for driving the product's position:

What you have with you is the history with customers. Back in Japan they want to implement something that is already established and if we can say that our Rubore brand is established with Volkswagen, Daimler, Opel, Ford, etc., they will go for it [...] if we can prove our capabilities with records that will support us. But again, we have to prove our words; otherwise they will not believe us. (Managing Director)

Lundström referred to the importance of establishing an image not only in the customer's mind, but also in a greater market and network of key players in order to build a strong brand reputation over time. In this context, competitor's pressure to continually improve is another element driving the brand. By constantly motivating the premium price, solutions also need to be continuously developed:

We have to become better in performance, so product development is of course very important to introduce new products [...] Innovation is very important to succeed and to strengthen high profitability and stay ahead of competition. [...] Competitors are coming pretty close; today we can say competitors have reached our level [...] Not the quality level, but at least the technical level. [...] We have to keep the distance and then provide other solutions and new ideas. (Product Manager)

The recent organizational changes that triggered the brand repositioning process on corporate level also affected organizational belonging. Since the JV was completed, Trelleborg Damping Solutions (formerly known as Rubore AB) is now part of the TSS BA. The global marketing and communications director for TSS stressed that space for 'real' daughter brands is scarce in the brand's policy:

Rubore is a trademark and we will of course keep the trademark globally. They have two areas, and we work slightly differently in these areas, but the principle is the same. The principle is that Trelleborg is the organization, the sender. So the sender signature of all messages is Trelleborg, and the high level positioning is the Trelleborg positioning. But for the Rubore product lines we use Rubore as, I would call it, a product line name. (Global Marketing & Communications Director)

### ***Brand Positioning Action***

The BU's objective is to continue being the leader in engineered silence in today's and tomorrow's automotive challenges (Trelleborg Rubore Product Brochure, published external document). Johansson believes that it is difficult to point at one thing in particular that positioned the company and its offerings in the early entrepreneurial years. However, focusing on solutions rather than only on the product was an important position differentiator:

From the very beginning we were the only company – compared to our competitors – really focusing on providing the industry with a solution and not just a product [...]. When customers came to Rubore, they came with a problem. We tested it and offered a recommendation free of charge. Of course, we had a product that was necessary to solve the problem. [...] In that way we positioned us as a solution provider. (Plant Manager)

Being the first to create the position of technological leadership for the brake shims business can be seen as another initial force; one that today's positioning activities still build upon:

We were the first with everything; for example, building noise dynamometers to test instead of driving cars. We tested in-house in a lab environment. Now all our competitors, even smaller ones, besides the two main ones, are investing in testing. But we were first, that's what people will remember. Even if others say 'we also have some dynamometers' it's still very much our measurements and standards that are applied to the competitor's [systems]. There is always one who is first. (Plant Manager)

The director of sales and marketing pointed out that positioning can be seen as an unconscious process, rather than a planned one:

Every time we meet a customer, you position yourself; or every time you meet a supplier we are trying to behave in a good business manner to position our company in the best way we can. So of course we are 'doing' positioning but we are not having it on paper. We have positioned ourselves since the very beginning; how we do business and what is our goal and strategy to get there. (Sales & Marketing Director)

Broberg explained that little advertisement is needed to position a superior and innovative product or solution. However, keeping this position requires activities to stay ahead of competition:

It's the product itself that should speak, profile itself, and create the position in the market, rather than doing a lot of campaigns and things like that. So on the marketing side we have done very little. It's our R&D expertise, our technical know-how, the product performance. All people here have made what Trelleborg and Rubore are today. [...] The actual challenge is to keep the positioning we have. Competition is of course getting closer every year. We have to be ahead one step all the time. I mean, we are a small organization and we have to prioritize things. (Sales & Marketing Director)

Part of these activities to stay ahead of competition is to constantly prove being the leading and preferred supplier for difficult solutions:

We still [succeed] in many projects where we have lots of competition, really strong competition. In cases where competitors have lowered the price just to get to business, we still come out as the winner. I think this shows that we are still performing. It's not one project a year, but many projects. (Plant Manager)

Lundström illustrated positioning with a typical position grid in which brands can occupy different wanted positions, with criteria like lower and higher quality and price. The following quotation illustrates the process of how Rubore arrived at the

position that the brand is known for today. Vision and strategy are necessary to initiate the process:

You get there through the years, through time. In this case we once upon a time took a position to have the best quality and best service, because they saw an opportunity. Because if you take a decision ‘we will not deliver any quality faults’, which means in the beginning, before you have maybe been able to steer your processes well enough, to have a lot of controls. [...] It can start day one if you have a new product: ‘We will not locate ourselves somewhere in the middle, but we will locate ourselves there’ [pointing at high-price/high-quality position in his drawing]. Then you take actions, means, and resources to make sure that you get there. (Managing Director)

The managing director also thinks that successful positioning can additionally be related to having “luck” in the beginning. He reflected upon the way the company was founded, and what made it unique. This was still at the time when Trelleborg did not own Rubore, but made Trelleborg interested in getting into the Rubore business:

It’s about the [production] process. We took a different process approach because we were working with Trelleborg at that time. Trelleborg only had [another] process. We are heating the rubber on the steel [the vulcanization process]. The others are spreading it on the steel. [...] We understood very quickly that we would have a much better and secured quality, and therefore we went very quickly for this process and defined that we should be ‘top quality’. [...] It was kind of trying in the beginning before realizing that this process is in fact qualitatively much better. (Managing Director)

Referring to ongoing positioning efforts, Lundström revealed that one always needs to improve interactions with customers and services around the product. State-of-the-art production and R&D facilities (such as 13 test dynamometers) are means to position the Rubore brand for the development of brake noise solutions.

To be very flexible in our R&D, so that the customer can get test answers very quickly, has been one way to position ourselves, also giving us the chance to continue growth. We are also having a wide material portfolio, which customers can choose from. This gives flexibility to the product assortment. [...] We are also selling test services. It means that our customers can ask us to make tests on our competitor’s shims, but then they have to pay for it. (Managing Director)

Purchasing Manager Robert Ackesjö gave an example of how the reaction time helps to position the solutions and differentiate Rubore:

We are better than competitors when customers ask for a new material [with very short notice]. Something that we don’t have in production today we can bring forward very, very quickly. For example, Ford USA asked mid of December [2011] for a new material with a new type of coating. This week [mid-January, 2012] we are actually running the [production]; and we had Christmas and New Years in-between. (Ackesjö, Purchasing Manager)

Ackesjö further highlighted that the product development process starts with the specification of the customer to tailor-make a solution. The purchasing manager

illuminated what type of actions, means, and resources are necessary to reach a favorable result and to strengthen an intended position. Salespeople are initiating new projects before handing over to R&D; sales and R&D then “interact to keep the customer up-to-date about what’s happening”. During the development phase of the product, involved actors “spend a lot of energy on making sure to have the right performance of the product”. Ackesjö explained that this is done through, for example, supplying the customer with several prototypes. The state-of-the-art production, R&D facilities, and customer support are important means to let customers experience the brand and what it stands for:

When you have customers here, they look at our machinery, capabilities, and they are just [impressed]. This is to continue positioning us. (Plant Manager)

This is what Rubore stands for: quick response, providing a prototype within two days in Europe, screening and full dynamometer [test]. In that respect, branding is very important. If you take the support away, the brand is not worth anything. The brand is built around the competence, support, and service that we deliver. (Product Manager)

Respondents revealed that a shift has been taking place, from a rather radical innovation in brake-noise solutions in the beginning, to more continuous improvements of Rubore’s position as a high-quality solutions provider. Being perceived by many customers as a trustworthy and invaluable partner is another way of positioning the brand:

The customers don’t have the resources themselves and they trust our tests more than other third party resources. [This] positions you as a very reliable, qualitative supplier of tests, which also spills over to the shims in the end. So it’s really a win-win for us. I think positioning is to really continue what we think we need to do, to show our customer that we are the quality choice for them. (Managing Director)

Having solutions ready before the market demands them adds to positioning the brand, by thinking ahead of customers and pushing them to think about future issues earlier. Lundström referred to this strategy as “common marketing”; in other words, understanding the history while also anticipating where the future is headed:

[You need to] be there, try to understand where the market is going, and be a couple of years ahead of your competitors. That’s one way of offering the customer something they don’t need today but maybe in five years. [...] That is the way we are working: to understand what will happen in the future in a market. (Managing Director)

However, such proactive market screening capabilities seem to apply for the existing shims business, but not particularly for newer NVH product areas. Becoming better in market research and effectively utilizing the Trelleborg brand when entering new markets or segments are success factors in need of further improvement. Learning from previous failures and changing the approach in product development and positioning is, therefore, desirable:

We have failed with a couple of new ideas lately. We liked the ideas internally but the market didn't really ask for it. We probably haven't done a good market research job to really understand the market needs. [...] We talked about that during the last conference. That's probably something where we can get help from outside. [...] Approaching a new market, both geographically and with new products, it probably might be good to use the Trelleborg branding: what is the competition today, what is their profile, how can we differentiate ourselves [...] We have to find those segments to compete and to fit in this box with the Trelleborg capacity and people. [...] This also requires some type of structure in product development. (Product Manager)

A recently developed customer analysis initiative is utilized to analyze and better understand how customers perceive the brands (Trelleborg and Rubore), as Lundström explained:

We conduct studies that we call 'customer analysis'. I was not happy with the level of information we received. It was more like day-to-day feedback and came from too few people. So we have involved a lady who is calling the customers and interviewing different levels of our customers from engineering, quality, and purchasing to understand where we are. We will soon see the results from that. (Managing Director)

However, Ackesjö warned that customer surveys should not be taken as ultimate guides for positioning the unit's offerings for the future:

I mean, if some of my suppliers come to me and ask 'how good am I compared to the competition?' I would not tell him, even if he is the best. I would probably tell him 'you are average', and that is something you can see sometimes depending on who you talk to. Some customers say 'this is really, really excellent', and if you ask someone else they say 'you are really, really lousy'. From the customer survey rating you can see that customers are not consistent. For example, when we ask about our pricing compared to competitors, we are always the worst, even though it's not always like that. (Purchasing Manager)

Solely relying on the brand and its track record can also be dangerous. Brand promise and value delivery (customer support, solutions, product quality) always need to be linked in order to assign legitimacy to the premium price, Norberg believes. "It's very difficult to only sell on the brand", he added. Norberg referred to the corporate-level initiatives to position the brand by increasing across-group collaboration as useful. Integration activities with other TSS entities had already started before the most recent repositioning process commenced, but still needed to be improved:

[Integration] is something where Trelleborg is not very strong, but we are starting to integrate with TSS. For example, when it comes to noise and vibration, we supply products that treat structural noise, but in most cases the noise is a combination of structural and airborne noise and we don't have a solution, because it's not in our profile. But there are other companies within Trelleborg that do provide similar products for other technologies where we could gain [...] For example, we could go out together and sell this as a 'Trelleborg NVH package'. I'm very convinced that this could be very successful. (Product Manager)

### *Brand Position Implementation*

In terms of externally implementing the intended position, Rubore utilizes elements such as communication in different automotive newspapers, participation in trade fairs, and sometimes sponsoring. Track record in marketing communications is important:

Communicating is mainly done through our good past. Daily support is the main way that we prove it. But we also have some advertisements and things like that; but you know, if you read something like 'you are best in the world' you don't believe in it until you have seen it. (Managing Director)

Writing technical white papers to increase the brand reputation of the technology leader in the field is another choice to externally position the brand. The company sometimes collaborates with car manufactures in order to increase trust:

Once we teamed up with Renault and tried to make use of a high profile customer [...] by presenting a paper together. We developed a new concept, and of course it is good to have Trelleborg and Renault together to present this. (Product Manager)

Industry fairs are another major channel for communicating the brand and its intended position. Since 2012, the Rubore technology was launched in new industrial markets, a decision driven by the new business area TSS.

### *Brand Positioning Outcomes*

Trelleborg Kalmar Sealing Solutions owns a strong product brand name in Rubore. The brand is associated with high quality and service at a premium price. Outside the European and US markets, the Trelleborg brand is stronger than the Rubore brand. Additional position outcomes are ISO quality certifications for various processes and a proven track record of being the leading and preferred supplier for brake shim and damping solutions. Finally, a growing internal understanding of both brands' (Trelleborg and Rubore) importance for positioning offerings is observable.

### *Brand Positioning Challenges*

One of the many challenges in staying ahead of competition is the aging of the product, commoditization, and ongoing price pressure, as Lundström and Johansson explained:



The longer a product is on the market, the more commodity-like it becomes. Also, the automotive industry is not willing to pay anything for something leading to price pressure. We see that the purchaser is getting more and more power. [Customers] are more and more careful, and maybe take more risks in choosing another material because of their cost-saving needs. Not many of the car manufacturers are profitable, so they are increasingly willing to take risks. (Managing Director)

Now there is very fierce competition where price is very, very important. Then again, with the product getting older, there is a lot of knowledge out there as well. But in our strategic plan, our mission is to always be ahead of our competition, [...] at least two years ahead. [...] Be ahead of our competitors and never give up. (Plant Manager)

To withstand the persistent price pressure, BU management needs to continuously find arguments to let customers pay premium prices:

We stress more on providing customers the system solution and try to stay away from the material view. And then there will be a commercial discussion in the end, but hopefully by then we have stressed to the project management that this is the solution [they need]. Hopefully they have tied in and we can really find the argument to pay premium because this is what we are providing. (Product Manager)

Another challenge is reaching market segments with “good enough material”, especially in terms of trusting the brand promise. The challenge is to extend towards mid-market segments without diluting brand reputation:

Sometimes we also discuss ‘should we really sell it under the product name Rubore?’ Maybe it should be something different, because Rubore should stand for high quality, good performance, and not cheap. (Plant Manager)

What we do is to find different, cheaper material or compositions, which are still very good quality but more related to ‘good enough’. There we have a challenge in itself: ‘shall we call this product Rubore then, or shall we call it good enough?’ [...] I mean, what products today should we re-brand instead? (Managing Director)

Generally, the BU faces the challenge of always being one step ahead of the competition to fortify leading positions and to differentiate compared to existing products in the market. Therefore, the unit (especially new product solutions) needs to become better in market pull, as opposed to market push. Being constantly innovative despite R&D employee’s split focus on routine work processes and extraordinary innovation projects makes this a difficult endeavor. Dealing with internal tensions related to mother-daughter brand strategy and ‘corporate level policing’ was an additional internal challenge. Recently, cross-group collaborations are promising to overcome a unit-specific tunnel vision in order to increase cross-selling potential of the corporate brand within Trelleborg Group.

Table 15 summarizes empirical findings of brand positioning processes at Trelleborg business level.

**Table 15**

## Summary of business-level brand positioning

Drivers	Action	Outcomes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Following early vision and strategy of being a complete solution provider</li> <li>- Culture and values to fortify leadership position</li> <li>- Conforming to corporate brand guidelines</li> <li>- Competitor's pressure to always improve and provide new ideas</li> <li>- Attracting future employees with strong reputation</li> <li>- Continuously improving financial results to please group management and financial market</li> <li>- Increasing competition from emerging markets and low-cost manufacturers</li> <li>- Adapting to changing marketplace and mature industry</li> <li>- Avoiding too much focus on price to prevent brand dilution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being first to offer customers in-house testing facilities</li> <li>- Understanding market opportunities to be ahead of customers and competitors</li> <li>- Leveraging Rubore brand reputation for product development in brake-related areas</li> <li>- Leveraging Trelleborg brand reputation for non-brake-related areas</li> <li>- Inviting customers to experience the brand with state-of-the-art production and testing facilities</li> <li>- Being flexible in R&amp;D in order to respond to customer needs quickly</li> <li>- Conducting customer surveys to learn about perceived position</li> <li>- Supplying customers with many prototypes during development projects to increase trust</li> <li>- Finding arguments for differentiation to make customers pay price premiums</li> <li>- Coupling success of end-customer (car manufacturers) to BUs offerings</li> <li>- Pulling end-customers towards demanding custom-made solutions</li> <li>- Cross-group joint marketing initiatives to develop segment strategy</li> <li>- Communicating intended brand position at selected industry fairs</li> <li>- Writing technical white papers to increase brand image and reputation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Owning strong Rubore product brand name</li> <li>- Brand associated with good quality, service, high-price</li> <li>- ISO quality certifications for various processes</li> <li>- Trelleborg brand perceived in a stronger way outside European markets</li> <li>- Proven track record of technology leadership and being preferred brake shim and damping solutions supplier</li> <li>- Growing internal understanding of brand importance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dealing with internal tensions related to mother-daughter brand strategy and 'corporate level policing'</li> <li>- Remaining one step ahead of competition to fortify leading positions</li> <li>- Extending towards mid-market segments without diluting brand image and reputation</li> <li>- Dealing with aging of products and increasing commoditization</li> <li>- Facing price pressures from customers and competition</li> <li>- Differentiating offerings from existing products in the market</li> <li>- Being constantly innovative despite R&amp;D's main focus on routinized work processes rather than innovation projects</li> <li>- Overcoming unit-specific 'silo thinking' to increase cross-selling potential within group</li> <li>- Becoming better in market pull instead of market push</li> <li>- Dealing with personnel changes in customers purchasing departments</li> </ul>

# Chapter 7 | Positioning Holmen

## About the Case Company

Holmen AB (Holmen) manufactures and sells printing paper, paperboard, and sawn timber. The company primarily operates in Europe and is headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden. It has approximately 4000 employees. Holmen is a forest industry group that is now entering its fifth century of existence.

The image shows the Holmen logo, which consists of the word "HOLMEN" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The letters are thick and blocky, with a consistent weight throughout. The logo is centered horizontally and occupies a significant portion of the page width.

### *Figure 22*

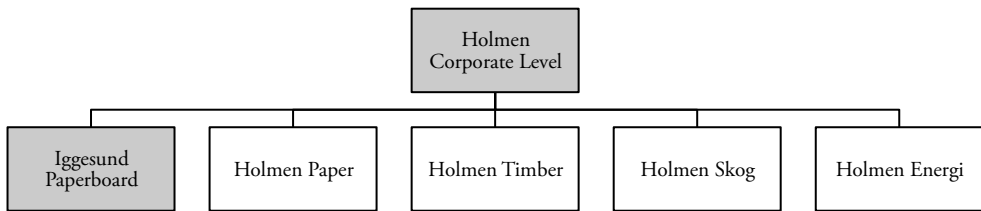
Holmen logo

### *Brief History*

The foundations for the company were laid when Duke Johan, grandson of the Swedish King Gustav Vasa, built a weapons factory in Norrköping in 1609. The production of weapons was soon replaced by producing textiles. Over the past 150 years, the focus of the Holmen Group has increasingly been on paper, whereat Holmen owns a sizable amount of forests themselves. At the end of the 1980s, the Swedish fine-paper manufacturer MoDo acquired Holmen and paperboard manufacturer Iggesund at the same time. The new group was named MoDo, but the name Holmen remained in the Holmen Paper business area. After being severely hit by the recession in the first half of the 1990s, the ownership structure of the MoDo group changed. Lundbergs, an investment company that manages and develops a number of companies by being an active and long-term owner, became the new principal owner. At the end of the 1990s the original MoDo companies were sold, and the company changed its name to Holmen (Holmen – A Journey Spanning Four Centuries, published external document).

## *Organizational Structure*

Holmen consists of three product-focused and two raw-material-focused business areas (see Figure 23). The Holmen Paper business area is undergoing a strategic reorganization, from producing standard newsprint to increasingly producing specialty paper. With products that challenge traditional paper choices, the goal is to attain new positions in a rapidly changing market. Iggesund Paperboard is consolidating its position as quality leader in Europe by continuing to improve the quality, service concept, and customer-led product development of its two product family brands: Invercote and Incada (MarketLine, 2012). Holmen Timber performs cost-efficient production at two large-scale units, integrated with a paper and a paperboard mill, respectively. Holmen Skog is responsible for managing and developing the company's land and forest assets, and is Sweden's fourth largest forest owner. Finally, Holmen Energi is in charge of the Group's hydropower production and is responsible for developing energy-related operations.



**Figure 23**

Holmen organizational structure

## *Competitive Landscape*

Holmen faces an intense competition in the market in which it operates. High exit costs and similarity between market players contribute to the high level of competition in the industry. Competition is based largely on price. The company competes with many large manufacturers and service providers. Its paper segment competes with numerous large players, as well as with smaller ones. The timber segment competes with national and regional suppliers, as well as with foreign producers. Iggesund Paperboard competes with manufacturers of value-added bleached and unbleached paperboard, as well as specialty paperboards. Since there are numerous players in the industry, overcapacity often leads to a decline in prices.

Additionally, there is rivalry for the raw materials, which pushes prices upwards. The main customer categories of Iggesund Paperboard's products include converters, who make packaging, and wholesalers and printers, who buy paperboard for use in graphics printing. The type of board Iggesund Paperboard manufactures is mainly used for the packaging of confectionery, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, perfume, and tobacco. Overall, Holmen competes with foreign producers, some of which are low-cost producers due to subsidies given by their respective local governments (MarketLine, 2012).

### ***Brand Strategy***

In a *daughter-mother brand strategy*, the daughter is endorsed by the mother brand serving as a seal of guarantee. Holmen, along with Iggesund Paperboard, represents the mother brand serving as the seal of guarantee; in practice, Holmen represents 'the face to the shareholders', internally and externally signaling there is 'no need to worry', as Iggesund Paperboard's Market Communications Director explained. In the case of Iggesund Paperboard, the endorsed daughter brands Invercote and Incada represent brands with a premium position on the market for paperboard packaging (according to industry brand surveys). The mission statement of Iggesund Paperboard today is to be a specialist supplier of high quality paperboards to targeted market segments, with a focus on innovation, efficiency, and excellent service. This mission is grounded in five brand values: strong customer focus, innovative product and process development, service excellence, world-class production facilities, and high level of competence.

### ***Brand Position and Perception***

Holmen occupies a noticeable business and operating position in most of the segments in which it operates. Holmen Paper is one of the largest manufacturers of wood-containing printing paper in Europe, and has a strong position amongst European daily newspaper publishers. Iggesund Paperboard is one of the largest manufacturers of paperboard and carton board in Europe and has a leading market position, mainly in solid bleached board in Europe, as well as being a significant operator in folding boxboard. Holmen Timber produces sawn timber. Holmen Skog and Holmen Energi account for the raw-material-oriented business areas in the Group's portfolio. The strong market positions provide Holmen with a competitive edge, as the firm offers easy access to raw materials, a strong production base, and marketing infrastructure; this makes it easier for the company to launch new products (MarketLine, 2012).

## Brand Positioning at Holmen Corporate Level

Structural changes around the millennium are described as “one of the many major turning points that the company has experienced during its 400-year history”. In 2007, Holmen decided to modify its strategic direction to comprise three product-based business areas and two raw-material-based areas, marking out “the direction to be taken during Holmen’s fifth century” (Holmen History, published external document).

Ingela Carlsson, Holmen’s head of corporate communications, believes that “you can’t be a strong brand if you are not a strong company”, and referred to many aspects that are paramount for being a successful company, like having a stable owner, good sustainability work, developing good products, or having a CEO that talks to journalists in a very truthful way. For her, these aspects and the recently developed Holmen core values are the things that build the brand. However, very few activities on corporate level can be counted as brand positioning activities, because all market issues and market communication responsibilities lie at the business areas, as Carlsson explained. Due to the different structure of customers within each different business area, letting the business areas work independently on their individual, market-related tasks is seen as most efficient. While the responsibility for operational activities has been decentralized to Holmen’s five business areas, the Group’s staff is in charge of coordinating certain matters, such as business administration and finance, HR, legal affairs, technology, and public relations. Holmen’s products are developed per business area, primarily where the greatest competence and experience are found; that is, at the production unit. This structure aims to ensure that Holmen is better than its competitors. Establishing an increasing number of group-wide processes, such as a management development program or a core-value-finding process, aims to help gathering strength across Holmen and its businesses. According to Holmen’s annual report, to a very large extent sustainability is regarded as a natural part of the business. Furthermore, financial, environmental and social sustainability are well integrated and solidly anchored in Holmen’s operations, strategies, and goals (Holmen AB, 2014). The importance of the Holmen corporate brand is highlighted with respect to sustainability issues, along with information being presented and constantly updated to promote the Group’s sustainability work and to support sales and marketing.

### *Brand Positioning Drivers*

The biggest market challenge Holmen continuously faces is that less and less paper is used, due to the rise of information technology and new media habits. Carlsson explained that Holmen has worked with this challenge for quite some time, and

explained necessary changes on the basis of the Holmen Paper business area's example and their efforts to win new market segments:

We have done a lot of things within Holmen Paper and changed to specialty paper. I mean, we have a very clear strategy on how to meet the challenges within the printing paper industry. (Carlsson, Head of Corporate Communications)

Besides these rather drastic changes the entire industry is going through, Holmen is a corporation that is changing slowly, while aiming to grow organically and trying to avoid quick changes, as Carlsson explained. She believes the source for this is in Holmen's strong ownership structure:

That's the image of Holmen, a very stable company. 'They don't come up with new ideas very quickly' or it's like 'they are working slowly but very decisively'. (Head of Corporate Communications)

Recent rebranding activities in terms of logo changes, with the aim of highlighting and strengthening the Holmen brand, are described as being driven both by external and internal developments; external drivers being competitors going similar ways in moving towards corporate brand logos, and internal drivers being business areas feeling the need of being part of a strong group:

[The logo changes] were big decisions, which were very easily taken. Some of our colleagues in the industry, SCA for example, also had a lot of sub-logos or business-area logos. Some years ago they took it away. We [also] had six logos when I started. It was Holmen, and then the name was written underneath. In 2010, business areas [were asking]: 'Why should we have this? Why don't we use only Holmen? That strengthens us to be a part of a group'. Holmen Paper [for example] felt that they don't need to be Holmen Paper as a separate part in this group; it's much better for them to show that they are Holmen. Now we only have two logos. (Head of Corporate Communications)

Another driver of positioning the Holmen corporate brand is group-wide sustainability communication via a common website, a common report, and group-wide messages:

What binds us together is sustainability communication, and that is, maybe, an element that we think we can find in all business areas and products, the sustainability message. [...] When we have customer or journalist visits coming to Iggesund from all over the world, for example, they take them out in the forest and show them how we handle the trees. And the visitors are really surprised, because they didn't expect that. This is something we are trying to support from here [corporate level]. (Head of Corporate Communications)

## ***Brand Positioning Action***

Carlsson explained that strategic positioning activities on group level take place when the Holmen CEO discusses questions related to markets and competition with the management of business areas in a business setting. The strategic direction is presented as “grow leading brands from a cost-efficient base” (Holmen AB, 2014). The fact that Holmen chose to have a self-sufficient business model, as the company has its own forests and energy supply, can be seen as a strategic decision and resource to position the company, considering the reasoning from the market communication director at the Iggesund Paperboard business area:

We have been through different eras; we have our own forests to a great degree within Holmen, which is unlike our competitors who divested the forest to ease up the balance sheet. We kept it – our owner [Holmen] kept it – the reason being a strategic resource. Today we know that if you have your own forests you are the king, in a way. The freedom of movement is so much stronger and bigger. Traceability, thinks like that, hygiene when you are working with foodstuffs, we know where the fiber comes from. (Einarsson, Market Communications Director Iggesund Paperboard)

‘Planning meetings’ with head of communications from the business areas takes place four times each year. Besides these formal meetings, there are many informal contacts between corporate- and business-level communication departments. All communication officers across the group (15 persons, including market communication staff) meet once a year for a ‘planning meeting’. Carlsson pointed out that since he started working for Holmen in 2008, information exchange activities gave way to collaborations between corporate and business levels:

When I started, my impression was that the cooperation between the communication responsables of the business areas and on group level was about telling each other what was happening, but today we have switched. We cooperate a lot, we work together, we do a lot of things in group-common activities instead of doing it at each separate unit. We meet very often, together, in small groups with different issues. (Head of Corporate Communications)

The role of the four people working in corporate-level communication is to collect information for the annual report from the business areas, and to engage in shareholder communication. Other activities include the publishing of company magazines; one is directed towards shareholders and forest owners, and the other targets Holmen’s own personnel. Sponsoring activities, internal communication and PR, press, and media work add to the activities of conveying a clear image and position of Holmen. Due to the different customer segments and targets, the organization of presence in industry fairs is the task of each business area. However, Carlsson saw the choice of setting up a group-wide business development department as a signal to strengthen the Holmen brand from the inside:



Of course we have business development departments down on business level, but we have this now also on group level. You can say that this is a signal that we are more and more working together within the company. (Head of Corporate Communications)

Around the same time Carlsson started working for Holmen, the company decided to change from many websites to just one (in addition to Iggesund Paperboard's own website). For the corporate communications director, the website is a very important marketing communication channel, and one of the few market-related tools of which she is in charge. The website is also utilized for cross-group image building and corporate storytelling:

We have tried to take more advantage of that than we did before. [...] It's really a strength to show forest suppliers what we are doing with their forest. I can't see anything but advantages to tell that story more and more. [...] Everybody feels proud and I think it's very important not only for the market communication but also for the employees to feel this proudness. That is something overall in Holmen, you are proud to work in Holmen. To see what happens with our products [...] strengthens this proudness. (Head of Corporate Communications)

An example of positioning the Holmen brand from the inside is the recent cross-group core-value-finding project that was initially driven by Holmen's HR executive manager:

I think it was the HR manager together with the CEO, and we formed a steering group for this work. The CEO, he really decided that 'this is something I believe in', that 'this is good for us', 'we need this', and that was the start; if you don't have a management that is committed with their heart, you won't succeed. (Head of Corporate Communications)

This change process of creating internal core values (in other words, what Holmen stands for across all independent business areas), has just started and has not reached closure, as Carlsson explained:

[We started with] a smaller front group of 20 people; Carlo Einarsson was in that group, for example; their work was then tested in a bigger group of 140 people. [...] All our employees were in workshops and discussed these three words or core values: 'courage', 'responsibility', and 'commitment'. [...] Then the group management finally decided about this. (Head of Corporate Communications)

### ***Brand Positioning Outcomes***

Holmen owns strong market positions with its product-focused businesses such as Iggesund Paperboard. Other brand position outcomes driven by corporate level are recently developed core values and sustainability awards that are strategically communicated.

## ***Brand Positioning Challenges***

As for challenges, Holmen is (as mentioned earlier) dealing with a market environment and consumption habits that are changing drastically; this requires the group to win new market segments or to fortify existing ones with a changed strategy.

Table 16 summarizes empirical findings of brand positioning processes at Holmen corporate level.

***Table 16***

Summary of empirical findings from corporate level

<b>Drivers</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structural changes and divestments</li> <li>- Market changes resulting in less usage of paper</li> <li>- BA need to be part of strong group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Planning quarterly meetings with head of communications from BAs</li> <li>- Conducting sustainability work to support sales and marketing in BAs</li> <li>- Utilizing self-sufficient business model to construct unique sustainability story for positioning purposes</li> <li>- Streamlining corporate website to tell sharpened corporate story for cross-group image and position building</li> <li>- Defining core values to help gather strength across businesses</li> <li>- Utilizing group-wide workshops to discuss core values and its impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Owning strong market positions</li> <li>- Defined core values</li> <li>- Sustainability awards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dealing with drastically changing market environment</li> <li>- Facing changes in consumption habits</li> </ul>

# Brand Positioning at Business Level

## *Iggesund Paperboard*

Iggesund's company history goes as far back as the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, in the small Swedish town with the same name, where it was originally an ironworks. Isak Breant Sr., a businessman and former court commissioner to Queen Kristina of Sweden, established the first mill, 'Iggesunds Bruk', in 1685. For Iggesund, branding has always been important in creating added value for its products over time, as evidenced by the fact that it has created premium products since its founding. Carlo Einarsson, Iggesund Paperboard's market communications director, sees a historical leitmotif of owning premium positions throughout the long history of the company's existence:

There is a premium positioning from the start, branding each little block, each bar [iron block] with the very first logo made in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was thought as important already back then. (Market Communications Director)

The logo for Iggesund Holmen Group features the word "IGGESUND" in a large, bold, blue, sans-serif font. Below it, the words "HOLMEN GROUP" are written in a smaller, grey, sans-serif font.

### ***Figure 24***

Iggesund Paperboard logo

Iggesund was a progressive company and one of the first in the world to try to use sawdust and wood to produce paper, though the technique remained experimental. In 1869, Baron Gustav Tamm became the owner of Iggesunds Bruk, and built a large sawmill. This was a major transformation for the factory, which had always been a small, traditional ironworks. The sawmill represented Iggesund's first step into the world of modern forest products, and the beginning of the modern forest industry. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the focus was on renewal, which included installing a mechanical pulp mill in Iggesund. The foundation for today's Iggesund Paperboard was laid when a cellulose factory was built early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lars G. Sundblad led the development and modernization of Iggesunds Bruk between 1956 and 1984. As the food industry started changing radically in the late 1950s with the

development of supermarkets, demand for hygienic paperboard for packaging grew. After travelling to the US and studying the developments taking place there, Sundblad realized that bleached paperboard was the ‘material of the future’ and that its market would soon reach Europe.

Iggesund Paperboard was one of the first three manufacturers in the world to acquire a modern paperboard machine; the other two companies were located in Australia and the UK. When Iggesund and the young CEO Sundblad decided to focus on producing added value pulp products and started the production in 1963, no one in Europe knew what the product was or wanted to buy it. Sundblad dared to take a leap into the unknown and convinced his board of directors to invest in the new technology. “We will make the world’s best paperboard” was the instruction Sundblad gave to the team that would eventually help him establish the business (The History of Iggesund’s Bruk, published external document). Einarsson explained that the produced paperboard was given a brand name from the start, a natural decision considering Iggesund’s heritage:

[The product] was given a brand from the start, which was natural. Well, a name is just a name and they had to start building value and living up to promises. The company has done that ever since. We are trying every single day; it’s ongoing all the time. We are spending more money on marketing and communication than most companies in our business, because we think it is very important. Of course, the sheer product has to live up to its promises, but you can package this in different ways and we try to. I very much believe in being different. (Market Communications Director)

Demand for bleached board, in particular, started to attract the graphics industry and tobacco companies. Today, the Iggesund Paperboard corporate brand and its two product brand families, *Invercote* and *Incada*, have leading positions in Europe for high-quality virgin fiber paperboard for use in the packaging, graphics, and tobacco sectors (MarketLine, 2012). Einarsson explained that the business area is working actively with the three brands (Iggesund, Invercote, and Incada), and that each brand fulfills a certain role and purpose:

We are working actively with three brands: Iggesund, Invercote, and Incada. Iggesund, the company name as such, stands for a huge value in the marketplace. It is a synonym for high value. If someone says ‘I am buying from Iggesund’, or sometimes they say ‘I buy Iggesund’, everyone knows what kind of quality they are looking for. ‘I want something like Iggesund’, then it reflects a wish to have something that is of really high quality. Iggesund stands for many values. (Market Communications Director)

Quality and quality consistency were already the pledges of the early years of manufacturing paperboard; that is, during the 1960s. In Iggesund, these values have been kept alive and passed down to today’s production of the spearhead product Invercote. Quality consistency is particularly valuable in giving converters and printers security in regard to their production economics and predictability of results. Over the years, Iggesund Paperboard has established itself as a quality leader because of the focus it places on quality consistency, as well as due to the mechanical

properties that appeal to all manufacturers of quality packaging as respondents revealed.

Since 2010, Iggesund is part of an exclusive group that includes fine Swedish companies that own the trademark of their corresponding town names, such as Gustavsberg, Orrefors, and Kosta Boda. Joining this select group required events such as a legal case, gathering testimonials, and doing a brand survey. Additionally, those involved in the process refreshed their knowledge of the company's history and its heritage of branding. Einarsson explained the rationale behind this decision:

We felt that we had a strong case and the court even referred to the fact that the company Iggesund had contributed to making the town better known than it had been. It feels good that we own Iggesund again. We are focusing our branding efforts on our product families Invercote and Incada, but it feels like a comfortable situation to own the name [Iggesund] and it provides us with possibilities and freedom. (Market Communications Director)

### ***Invercote and Incada Brand Families***

Working with brands in a long-term manner is a great part of the Iggesund heritage. One of the Iggesund Paperboard corporate brand businesses consists of the brand family *Invercote*. The word 'Invercote' relates not only to the "superior physical characteristics of the paperboard" produced, but also to "satisfying customers' needs through all aspects of the business relationship - from product development through manufacturing, distribution and commercial service, to after-sales support" (Paperboard – The Iggesund Way, published external document). The Invercote brand family consists of a range of products customized for different end-user applications and manufactured at the mill in Iggesund, Sweden. Invercote is a multilayered 'Solid Bleached Board', made from virgin fibers and chemical pulp produced by the sulphate pulping method. This method ensures a hygienic, odor and taint neutral product, approved for food contact according to current regulations. The Invercote brand family consists of approximately 30 different products (Paperboard – The Iggesund Way, published external document).

# **INVERCOTE!®**

***Figure 25***

Invercote logo

The second Iggesund Paperboard business consists of the brand family *Incada*, which comprises products customized for different end-user applications. The different Incada products are manufactured at the mill in Workington, UK. Incada products are widely used for book covers, greeting cards, and the packaging of food, cosmetics, chocolate, pharmaceuticals, and tobacco products. Incada is a multilayered 'Folding Box Board', made of virgin fibers in a mechanical production process. The outer parts of the board are actually made of solid bleached virgin fiber, while the inner plies are made from only partly bleached mechanical fiber. (Paperboard – The Iggesund Way, published external document).



INCADA®  
pure paperboard

**Figure 26**  
Incada logo

Both Invercote and Incada are among the strongest brands in their fields, but are differently positioned: Invercote as 'super premium' and Incada as 'functional premium', as explained by Einarsson. The advantage of the chemical process used for manufacturing Invercote is achieving extremely strong fibers. The natural glue used in the mechanical process for manufacturing Incada makes the board much more brittle, less elastic, reduces the degree of whiteness and makes it less strong; on the other hand, the advantage of the mechanical process is that more pulp and more thickness are achieved in the production process, which gives the board more stiffness. Guy Mallinson, business director for the European packaging and graphics business, explained that customer segments that are looking for more stiffness and less spending would choose Incada, while premium segment customers that are looking for very intricate designs or would like to do embossing would select Invercote.

#### *Creating the Invercote Brand*

When the Iggesund mill invested in its first paperboard machine, in 1963, the bold decision was taken to produce a brand new product with a new, untried technique for a segment that did not exist in Europe (although it had been defined) for an equally non-existent customer base. At the time, the decision was particularly bold:

This one man [Sundblad] convinced the board of directors to invest any penny they had in a venture that was so full and filled with risk and completely ‘greenfield’: the technology, product, segment, and no customer base. The company said ‘let’s do it’. And then this gentleman said, now you have to consider: ‘if a company is about to take that sort of risk, it’s got to be something special, it’s got to be something extra’. There you have the positioning of Iggesund. (Market Communications Director)

It was also decided, from the start, that the product would have its own name. The process was called *Inverform* and the paperboard was initially called *Inverboard*, because the new technical process made it possible to create a paperboard in several layers. After a while, Iggesund Paperboard management wanted to emphasize the paperboard’s first-class print reproduction qualities, so the brand name was changed to *Invercote* in order to reference its coating capabilities. Mallinson highlighted that Invercote is a brand that was built up very gradually, whereas the product itself was “a pure invention at a time when nobody was sitting and waiting for this product”. Since the launch of Invercote, the consumer packaging market grew very quickly, and because of the specific qualities of Invercote, it quickly established itself by the mid-‘70s as a fairly unique product and brand name. The following quotation illustrates the perceptual development Invercote made through the decades, becoming a generic name and prestigious brand.

By the end of the ‘80s, Invercote became a generic name already; people were saying ‘I want an Invercote’. They didn’t necessarily know what it was, but they knew it stood for a number of values, they knew what they were looking for. The rise to fame was really in the ‘90s, when, in particular, Invercote established itself as the absolute leader in premium packaging and where the company developed a very strong approach towards a number of brand owners to get them to specify the product, [...] getting them to say ‘for our packaging and our prestigious brand, we would like Invercote’. It came to the point, that Invercote was systematically shortlisted and very often took the business for almost any job in any premium segment. (Mallinson, Business Director)

According to Mallinson, the strength of the Invercote brand probably peaked in the mid-2000s. Invercote is still a strong brand today, but it has been challenged in the marketplace. The self-conception of the Invercote brand business is one that tries to reach beyond being perceived as ‘paperboard’:

We do not make paperboard; we are not even into packaging. Together with our customers we are in the seduction business. To take it one step further: We are not even in the seduction process; we are in the process of Invercote, because paperboard, packaging, and seduction equal our brand. Our brand embodies all this. (Market Communications Director)

### *Creating the Incada Brand*

Igesund’s second product brand family was launched in 2001. Due to the two products’ fundamental differences, the choice was made to keep Invercote separate from Incada, even if Incada products were launched under the Invercote brand. This,

however, was considered too dangerous. Mallinson clarified that compared to the rather slow and gradual development of the Invercote brand, the Incada brand name very much came ‘out of the blue’. The business director recalled how this process occurred:

We collaborated with *Interbrand* and went through hundreds and hundreds of different proposals. We wanted something that sounded nice, that was easy to say, that in a way wasn’t too far away from Invercote but still quite different, and we came up with the word Incada. It could have been totally different. (Business Director)

The product behind the Incada brand already existed, and was strongly developed through investments and research before it was eventually renamed. Incada is produced in the UK and had other names before the 2001 rebranding, resulting in two varieties: Incada Excel and Incada Silk. Mallinson explained that this whole process, in a way, was a bit like “surfing on the success of Invercote”. The following quotation illustrates how quickly the new brand was established in the market.

Iggesund managed to introduce the product very quickly [...] They made a name for it very fast and according to the brand surveys we have done over the last few years it is actually now overtaking Invercote. It [Incada] is well established as a brand and it went very, very fast. Within six or seven years it was already very well established. (Business Director)

Nevertheless, respondents highlighted that the Incada name and product are different enough to stand apart and to convey a “distinct charm and tone” than that of Invercote. Compared to Invercote, Incada is more rational than emotional, more functional than special, and less colorful in its expression. The Iggesund market communication director described this distinction in a nutshell:

Invercote is shipping dreams; Incada is shipping function and satisfaction. (Market Communications Director)

### ***Business Context***

In the premium segment of the consumer packaging and graphics market, all efforts are directed towards drawing attention to the respective brands. Iggesund is positioning its company as the brand that makes it possible to produce the demanding material to be used in creating the best possible packaging solutions for brand-owner’s market offerings (INSPIRE, Iggesund Paperboard Magazine, Issue 29, 2008). At least 70 percent of the added shelf appeal of a product comes from packaging. Iggesund aims at adding even more desire to the brand’s marketing ability by means of its product innovations (INSPIRE, Iggesund Paperboard Magazine, Issue 29, 2008). However, there is a long chain of intermediaries between Iggesund and companies requiring to package or print something. Communications are complicated because Iggesund’s (direct) customers are printers or packaging



manufacturers. Printers and converters have always been very close to Iggesund's brands, as they deal with the material on a daily basis. Due to their experience, they have recommended Invercote to many of their customers who, in turn, have become 'Invercote aficionados', as an external consultant to Iggesund explained. However, the eventual decision on what material to be used is made by the brand owners or designers that hire them. Although designers and brand owners are exceptions on Iggesund's customer list, the company wants to use its communication channels (for example, Iggesund's website) to learn more about these influencers and to communicate with them. Einarsson explained the rationale behind this choice of targets and communication:

Our target groups are designers, brand owners, and design agencies. Designers and specifiers are working for advertising agencies. Sometimes you have design agencies and they are working with brand owners, and sometimes trademark owners have their own in-house design agencies, so this is a very wide definition. It is really the marketing people influencing the choice of product. (Market Communications Director)

By branding the products Iggesund Paperboard produces, the company obtains a platform to discuss the products and what they can do. For example, the brands convey the "added value the products can create for customers" and give them "the freedom to work with a product they know will work well", Einarsson explained. Invercote's direct customers have very strong international brand owners in their customer list, where the packaging is very important. In extremely high-end premium products, the box has the function of both protecting and promoting the product. Einarsson explained how this fact leads to exceptionally high customer demands:

Their demands are absolutely high; they don't accept anything less. That's why they are paying a premium price, not only for special converting techniques for the special print they absolutely need; they also want to have security in demand and they are absolutely relentless on service. They want to have a foot in any product development that is coming out, and they want to be in the forefront concerning research and development of Iggesund's paperboard products. (Market Communications Director)

When it comes to competition, plagiarism presents itself as a challenge for the company. With this in mind, brand heritage is highlighted as a valuable asset to fortify positions in markets and minds: "Then you realize how valuable our heritage is", Einarsson explained.

### ***Brand Position and Perception***

Industry reports confirm the strong brand positions of Iggesund Paperboard's Invercote and Incada; both brand families rank as the strongest brands on the European paperboard packaging market, according to a European brand survey of 1,000 converters and brand owners (such as Nivea cosmetics, Taittinger champagne, or Bulgari perfumes) by the global market research company Opticom International

Research. Leading the league table are brands from three big manufacturers: Iggesund, Stora Enso, and M-real (Opticom, 2010). In June 2010, Invercote was rated the 'Most Valued Brand' in its industry by brand tracking survey "Cartonboard for consumer packaging", conducted by Opticom International Research. Invercote maintains its position as the most valued brand among Western European converters, while Incada ranks fourth. The survey ranks the most valued paperboard brands in Western Europe according to converters. The results take into account both awareness of and satisfaction with the brands, which encompasses quality associations, perceived brand performance and loyalty towards brands. The survey data was compiled from interviews with 213 converters from seven Western European countries, all producing folding cartons for cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, confectionery, food, wine, or spirits (Opticom, 2010).

## Communication-Driven Repositioning (2006–2008)

### *Brand Positioning Drivers*

Respondents see branding as part of the DNA of the company, in the sense that it is different and adds something 'special', despite it being a forest product company in a conservative industry. Branding means "claiming a territory", as explained by Einarsson. Yet, what is driving the company to position and reposition their brands over time to claim or reclaim such territories? One aspect of a positioning driver is the company's traditionally held product leadership position and heritage, as well as its need to adapt to changes through the times:

Someone needs to lead. It's our job to do it. Sometimes we do the wrong thing, sometimes we are lucky, but the company is still making money and we have been around for quite a few years, and we intend to do so in the future. [...] Sometimes heritage can be a liability. But the attitude from our heritage is really trying to do something different, to do something unexpected, 'go your way', 'be true to yourself and your customers'. If you don't look outside, your customers, who are paying your salary, will disappear. Make sure you know what they *really* want. (Market Communications Director)

When repositioning and relaunching its flagship brand (Invercote) in 2008, Iggesund consciously decided to reinforce the emotional appeal of its brand communications. The aim was to "remarkably change how we feel and see in our industry", while letting Invercote "remain true to itself and its customers" by retaining its core brand values and at the same time adding a new brand aspect. Furthermore, values are seen as a necessary precondition; without them it is not possible to brand or to position, Einarsson explained. Modernizing and updating the look and feel while at the same

time developing the products' technical qualities can be seen as driving the process of repositioning Invercote, as highlighted by Michael Meier, external brand consultant to Iggesund. He explained that the relaunch offered "a chance to display those properties that make Invercote such a prime print base material, which has taken the demands of the printing industry to its heart" (INSPIRE, Iggesund Paperboard Magazine, Issue 29, 2008).

Besides renewing the attraction of the brand, growing profitability and market share were additional drivers behind repositioning Invercote:

You do this to gain more attraction. Invercote gets noticed in a certain way, and because of that, the awareness of Iggesund and Invercote is of course renewed, like 'let's not forget Invercote'. The ultimate idea is, of course, to increase profitability and to sell more, obviously. (Market Communications Director)

The Iggesund Paperboard market communications director added that the Invercote brand became too sterile, even though it had previously been very successful. Therefore, it needed to be rejuvenated:

[Invercote] was too sterile. It was time [to change], because the brand had not moved. I felt that. When I started to talk about this, people said you might have a point here. I'm glad that I was able to convince them. (Market Communications Director)

This aspect leads to another driver of starting a repositioning project, namely a change in personnel and brand responsibility and the related goal of leaving one's own mark on the brand:

Starting to work with these things, I felt that the positioning of Invercote was a bit dusty. I felt it was boring. It was perceived like 'yes, it's so nice up there, so beautiful' and the company looked at it in a way like 'don't touch'. It was beautiful but it didn't touch you. It was nice but it didn't leave an impression. It was too clean, too clinical. It was like a three-piece suit and a glass of champagne. Ladies coming along with their long dresses, metaphorically speaking. It was too established. It used to be black and white, so we were bringing more emotion in, bringing music into the picture, and trying to make it more colorful. (Market Communications Director)

Climbing the value chain and increasing the customer value can be seen as an additional driver of this repositioning project, as explained by Einarsson: "of course, as everyone else, we are trying to 'up' the offer and to build more value into the pot". He added that although this becomes increasingly difficult to achieve, it is still a must for the company. The external brand consultant underlined this 'reaching up' driver:

[To the brand-owner decision makers], paperboard was thought of at the end of the chain, but now we want them to see it as a relevant tool for their marketing. Through Invercote's use of sensual and provocative images, Iggesund hopes these customers will be able to realize how Invercote will support them to make their products appear in a desirable light. (External Brand Consultant, as cited in INSPIRE, Issue 29, 2008)

## ***Brand Positioning Action***

Essentially, there are three ways in which Iggesund positions its brands. Mallinson explained that one way of positioning is through the segments that Iggesund targets with its brands; a second positioning stream deals with the ways Iggesund communicates about the brands; finally, the brands are also differently positioned by pricing, as Invercote is 20-25 percent more expensive than Incada. Considering positioning by segmentation, the following quotation illustrates that Iggesund is not selling the Invercote and Incada products to the same target segments or sub-segments. The branded products are positioned by the segments Iggesund targets:

We are looking into niche segments, we are really trying to sell Invercote where the specific qualities of the board are recognized and needed, and people are prepared to pay for it. So they tend to be the top end of a number of segments in packaging or in graphical applications, where they need the specific attributes and advantages given by this product. Incada, on the other hand, is a much more common product, more easily available and not so unique, but still of good quality. We are selling [Incada] to parts of the segments that are just beneath the top end. For instance, we are selling a lot of Invercote to premium cosmetics and toiletries and a fair amount of Incada to the middle or lower end of that segment. (Business Director)

Considering positioning by communication, Mallinson explained that Iggesund has traditionally positioned Invercote as a truly premium brand with a note of “prestige and luxury”, whereas Incada is positioned as the “functional or business board”, that is all about “pure, solid, and reliable performance”.

Those are the main differentiators. The other thing is that Invercote [...] is more technical, requires much more selling and promotion, and much more support to sell it in many respects. So our communication has been much more focused on Invercote over the years, putting most of our efforts and investing most of our budget for communication into Invercote rather than into Incada. (Business Director)

The previous insights clarify that Iggesund does not leave the positioning of its brands to chance. Einarsson explained that there is a common thread in marketing and communication activities that are moreover following a distinct plan. During a three-year journey of change and rejuvenation, several positioning activities and choices were made. Alongside improving the functional qualities of its products, the goal was to change the entire perception of Invercote by further differentiating the brand:

When our industry is going rational with all the abbreviations – boring – we are trying to include the emotional part into our communication, having emotional values determining the way we position ourselves with our product brands. (Market Communications Director)

Before the repositioning project, the Invercote brand values were elegance, style, and class, occupying the upper corner of a pyramid in a market-positioning sense. The following quotation illustrates how Iggesund tried to develop this further:

Elegance, style, class were there and inherited to keep true to the brand. You cannot completely change, so we kept the core values and added 'provocation'. We have to be edgy and provocative. We have also identified suitable music to support the position for the brand, brought in colors, not black and white [anymore]. Our website is made up of 80 percent image and 20 percent text. It's very deliberate. (Market Communications Director)

Starting from a position of strength, the idea then was to move the intended position for the Invercote brand in order to increase market shares. Einarsson referred to this segment of the market as one that has been "carefully, carefully, developed"; he adds this segment is actually "out of the market, blowing everybody away". At the same time, a decision was made to also raise the profile and position of Incada in the market, taking over the "carefully nurtured garden" from Invercote to avoid occupation by competitors, as Einarsson vividly described. Part of this process was a decision to 'verbalize' the brand Invercote, turning it from a noun to a verb. Einarsson explained the rationale behind this decision:

'Invercote your dreams' is just one way the company is using the new verb. It describes how designers' dreams of new packaging can become a reality through printers and converters using Invercote. 'Invercote your day' – means to fill your day with enjoyment and quality. Make the best of everything, why settle for less? The company wants marketing professionals to understand that by using Invercote, they will be able to go beyond the current standards of the industry. This use of color and emotion is new to our industry. (Market Communications Director, as cited in INSPIRE, Issue 29, 2008)

The research phase in the positioning process was mainly informed by internal research, Einarsson explained. However, a few key customers were involved as references. Part of the process involved activities such as working with positioning perception maps, with the intention of changing the perception of Invercote. The following quotation gives insights into the activities of this stage of the process:

In 1996 Invercote was perceived as 'duty, virtues, pleasure, community virtues, and autonomy'. These were the ones we circled when we talked about 'where do we want it to be in the future'. This is what we had and it confirmed also my feeling. [...] We went from 'beauty' to 'pleasure'. It's so far away from the rational 'solid, prudence, industry, or perfection'. [Now it's] 'seduce, magic, dynamic, emotion, desire', all these words. We came up with a new typography. (Market Communications Director)

Einarsson described the role of the CEO as very supportive, even though the outcome of this project was not crystal-clear in the beginning. The CEO agreed that one sometimes needs "to try new things"; otherwise, one never grows, Einarsson explained. An important choice was made to not fully inform sales staff and mill staff too early in the repositioning process because of confidentiality reasons. The following quotation illustrates the market communication department-driven project focus, with the executive management team still in need to be fully convinced of the planned changes:

[We utilized workshops] towards the end, when we basically had decided but still needed to sell it to the management to be more in agreement. We informed sales and mill staff that there will be quite a big change. [They asked] ‘can you show us something?’ [We said] ‘no’, because we are being copied so much, we are afraid that this will leak. We were to launch in June of 2008, and in March, early April we showed it to sales; no one can copy in three months. (Market Communications Director)

The market communication director stressed that such a project takes a considerable amount of time: working with the development and thinking stages took three years, including selling it internally. Interestingly, the initial idea was to only reposition Invercote. In 2007, Invercote and Incada still looked the same; both brands had the same typeface so as to associate the newer Incada with the established Invercote reputation. During the process, Incada also needed to change:

The thing was that we only wanted to reposition Invercote. During that process Incada, the old Incada, started to look bad. The gap was enormous; it became enormous. Invercote was so like the music, the imagery, the messages, turning it into a verb, it was amazing. Then Incada was the ugly duckling, so we said we have to do something, so we did something very, very quick; we changed the logo, and we came with a pickup line: ‘pure paperboard’. (Market Communications Director)

Iggesund Paperboard’s business director further explained the changes that were made with respect to Incada, also highlighting the fact that it was a matter of pure market communication involvement:

We basically put Incada a little bit more on the map, in a more assertive way. Incada got a specific logotype, a more modern look, we were giving it some clear characteristics, which had not been done in quite the same clear outspoken way before. [...] It really raised the profile of Incada, and actually gave it more assertiveness and a little less modesty. Our Swedish friends sometimes can be overly modest, because they are very cautious and would hate to be seen as bragging, which is great, but sometimes you need to be a bit more assertive and that is what we have done with Incada. [...] It was almost entirely based on a market communications operation. (Business Director)

In retrospect, Mallinson thinks that the changes that were decided upon and implemented between 2006 and 2008 were rather cosmetic when compared to the facelift-type changes that are currently taking place in a large-scale repositioning project:

On the Invercote side this was more a cosmetic change [2006–2008]; it was really that we just varnished it again and put lacquer on; that was it. There was no fundamental change. [...] What we did a few years ago was to go through a very slight shift; it was a minor shift compared to the one we are preparing now. (Business Director)

However, project leaders needed to overcome resistance to change during initial buy-in stages, even though the business director assessed the changes as non-fundamental. Management was still facing the challenge of bringing emotion to a very rational industry, as already stated earlier:

It's a very complicated process industry. I see my job as trying to move emotional values into it, so that there is a combination [...] People were saying, 'What are you doing?' 'Don't you know that this is paperboard?' Yes, we make paperboard but this is not the issue [I replied]. We are actually trying to make contact with our end-users [brand owners] and the marketing people. And this is more their frequency. (Market Communications Director)

### *Brand Position Implementation*

After agreeing and finalizing changes in Invercote's typeface, logo, verb structure, graphical identity, look and feel, identity characteristics, communication mix, and target audience, the first external campaigns were launched in the summer of 2008. The campaign '*Invercote your dreams!*' was both effective and successful, and won the Forest Industry Award for best marketing initiative in the Nordic forestry industry, in September of 2009. With '*Invercote your design!*', Iggesund Paperboard found a campaign successor that gives its customers an even stronger sense of what they can achieve with Invercote. This campaign focused on various designers and what they can creatively do with Invercote (INSPIRE, Issue 36, 2010). This resulted in '*The Black Box Project*' and the goal of challenging designers to produce spectacular creations by using Invercote material. Part of the project involved systematically communicating with the design profession via email-reports about the project and its progress. Einarsson explained that "designers are a sensitive group to target using mass communications; communicating with them must therefore be very relevant". He further explained the rationale behind creating a platform for designers:

We had to educate the market and show them our new face. That was absolutely necessary. [...] Then we came up with '*The Black Box Project*'; the idea was to create a platform for designers to work from; they are the heroes, not Iggesund. Iggesund and Invercote made it possible, but the hero was the designer. But if they are speaking well of Iggesund and Invercote, it reflects quite nicely. (Market Communications Director)

### *Brand Positioning Outcomes*

Invercote is rated 'Most Valued Brand' in its industry, and is often perceived as the 'Rolls-Royce of paperboard'. The Black Box Project', communicating Invercote's premium position, won gold at the 'Best of Business-to-Business' communication awards (Marconomy, 2013). Both Invercote and Incada brand families rank as the strongest brands on the European paperboard packaging market, and have won market share since repositioning (Opticom, 2010). Incada has won market share and a lot of recognition since 2008, even though the main communication focus was directed towards Invercote: "Looking at the brand surveys", updating Incada resulted in a "much clearer standing in the market", Mallinson reasoned. The business director summarized the repositioning efforts and successful outcomes:

The rejuvenation in terms of communication of the Invercote brand certainly made its mark, even if I say it was a much smaller operation compared to today. We brought some improvements to the products, but it was almost all about branding. I am not saying that I am disappointed and customers can look through that saying ‘it’s just branding’, but in many respects that’s what it was. It certainly made the brand much younger, more personalized. It turned Invercote into a verb, which was a bit of a revolution, at least in our industry, but we kept the positioning of ‘fairly prestigious high level but nevertheless young’. Rejuvenating is definitely what we did, but in some respect it was more a cosmetic change; it wasn’t fundamental. (Business Director)

## ***Brand Positioning Challenges***

Case evidence showed that the repositioning project of Invercote and Incada can take a considerable amount of time due to internal buy-in and selling-in. Being convincing, internally, towards a brand-oriented mindset in a very rational and conservative industry proved to be a difficult task.

Table 17 summarizes empirical findings of episode one at Iggesund business level.

***Table 17***  
Summary of positioning during episode one

<b>Drivers</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
- Brand leadership position and heritage	- Buying-in to CEO and executives	- Invercote and Incada ranked among strongest brands (EU paperboard packaging market)	- Project takes a lot of time due to internal buy-in and selling
- Pressure to stay ahead of competition	- Choosing not to fully inform sales and mill staff too early in repositioning process (confidentiality issues)	- Invercote perceived as ‘Most Valued Brand’	- Convincing using a brand-oriented mindset in a rational and conservative industry
- Reinforce brand’s emotional appeal once it becomes outdated	- Utilizing mainly internal research	- Incada ranked 4 <sup>th</sup> place	
- Grow profitability and market share	- Involving key customers for brand analysis	- Invercote perceived as ‘Rolls Royce of paperboard’	
- Change in personnel (brand responsibility)	- Segmenting Invercote and Incada differently		
- Increasing end-customer benefit communication	- Working with perception maps aiming to change brand perception		
	- Creating new brand typography for Invercote		
	- Adding fourth brand value to Invercote		
	- Verbalizing the brand (for example, ‘Invercote Your Dreams’)		
	- Updating Incada brand after having rejuvenated Invercote		
	- Changing Incada logo, imagery, and tagline (‘Pure Paperboard’)		
	- Communicating Invercote as ‘super premium’ and Incada as ‘functional premium’		
	- Adjusting pricing differences according to intended position		
	- Conducting workshops towards end of project once main decisions were taken		
	- Selling changes to executive management for final approval		
	- Running campaigns to convey intended position		



# Technology-Driven Repositioning (2011–2014)

## *Brand Positioning Drivers*

Iggesund currently – and once more – finds itself in a repositioning project. The current project is large-scale and includes participants from the whole organization, compared to the communication-department-driven project elaborated upon earlier. Business Director Mallinson explained that the goal in the present repositioning process is to actually “shift the position” of Invercote; this is necessary because the market has become considerably tougher since the latest position change project took place in 2008, which was also the beginning of the worldwide economic crisis. Therefore, in this case the planned changes are not optional; they are imperative. Mallinson summarized the external drivers of the project as follows:

Competition has moved on, purchasing habits have changed, purchasing departments live a life of their own and we have got to adjust Invercote to a more modern world. That’s not unusual for a product that is 50 years old, so it needs a bit of rejuvenation and we’ve got to be able to sell the features, advantages, and benefits of this product to an audience that will be in 2014, 2015, 2016 receptive in a way that is different from the 2000s, ‘90s, ‘80s. That’s the challenge we have now. A lot of that is based on the perception of the brand. (Business Director)

Regarding the changes in competitive landscape, Mallinson explained that Iggesund Paperboard’s competitors have developed and changed considerably while the pace of change has also accelerated. His following quote highlights the rationale of the positioning driver in relation to both competition and technical product development.

When you are in a competitive environment where a number of competitors have caught up with you, it’s of course more difficult to make a significant technology step or breakthrough, which will give you a leap ahead of your competitors. It’s little, incremental improvements only, so the brand still plays a critical role but it’s not enough. You can live on a brand for a while but you got to continue developing it. [...] So you have to keep on your technical development to keep that edge, because you can only surf on the wave while it’s still there, but that wave dies. Then you need to regenerate the [brand] wave and it won’t necessarily be as big as the first one. But if you don’t do that it can be counterproductive. (Business Director)

A changing market and continuously changing customer needs add to driving this repositioning project. Iggesund has been increasingly trying to address the fact that brand owners are becoming more knowledgeable, which makes it more difficult to rely solely on brand trust and reputation for sales.

Brands are still important, but the brand owners we talk to have become considerably more knowledgeable in board and converting technologies and techniques. They know much more about it and have a much more qualified opinion on the products that they are specifying. Beforehand they relied on, you know, 'if L'Oreal and Chanel are using Invercote, it somehow must be the right way to do it'. So the brand really carried us. But today they have a much better judgment and are much more critical themselves [...] They not only buy on the face of the brand. The brand is a safety stamp, but it doesn't necessarily mean that they immediately choose you. (Business Director)

A third driver of change is the fact that purchasing departments are becoming more powerful, and consequentially more challenging for the success of Iggesund's flagship brand, Invercote. Mallinson and Einarsson explained that the rationale in purchasing has also developed, and that Invercote's brand image needs to change:

Invercote has a Rolls-Royce or Ferrari image, but we are talking about an industrial consumer product. Talking to consumers is one thing, but I am talking to people who are in industry and purchasing departments that live a life of their own, unfortunately. So they see Invercote, and they look at competition and say 'why should we spend 10, 15, 20 percent more if it basically delivers the same thing?' And then our image only makes it worse: 'Do you really consider Invercote? You must be joking. Did you say you specified Invercote? You can't be serious'. [...] So we might have to come down to Earth a little bit; rethink. We want to keep all the positive things and the strengths of Invercote but make it appealing to people. (Business Director)

People refer to us as the Rolls-Royce in a positive way, but we don't like that, because only a few people can afford a Rolls-Royce. We would rather be a BMW 3 or 5 series. It's still upmarket, cool, very nice, it runs well, and has a certain image. We are not a VW but we don't want to be a Rolls-Royce. (Market Communications Director)

### ***Brand Positioning Action***

This episode's change initiatives primarily focused on Invercote. Respondents explained the ways in which the current change process differs from the significantly smaller changes that were executed during the previous repositioning process:

This time it's a bit more like a facelift. We are making and preparing some rather bigger changes. [...] The future of the company is hinging on this. It's quite essential. [...] But that does not mean that we are throwing away [what we have established]. [...] We are still trying to keep that very strong brand image. (Business Director)

We are building on what we have and we are developing something, where the platform will still be there. But it will be quite a radical change. (Market Communications Director)

Mallinson explained that this project involves the whole company, including product development, technical service, sales, product management, and market communications. The rationale behind this integrated marketing effort has been to

“pursue the development of the product in specific ways”. This involves asking challenging questions and extensively looking at the product’s market:

Are they [markets of today] the same as the markets of tomorrow? Are we going to keep the business we have today or are we going to move into different areas? How are we going to do this? What are the technical developments required? How should we change the way our brand is perceived in the market? Is the brand too upmarket? Is it too prestigious? Have we made Invercote so exclusive to the point of exclusion? I am trying to say: we made it so exclusive that it excluded itself. In a lot of cases Invercote is seen as so special and expensive that people are automatically disqualifying it. People are saying ‘no, no, don’t consider Invercote, it’s too expensive’. (Business Director)

The position change project was a group management decision, and kicked-off with a pre-project at the end 2011 and beginning of 2012, Mallinson explained. The project was run throughout 2012 and then handed over to the ‘Group Management Team’ in the autumn of 2012. The main project has been running since 2013, consisting of three parts: the first part is an investment project (mill and production); the second is about product development and catering to required changes; and the third part is a market project, which is sub-divided into separate elements, such as marketing strategy, which is “defining what exactly the segments, the targets, the services required are”, as explained by the business director. Elaborating upon how the change initiative developed, Mallinson depicted that it was initially a group management-level decision that was made years ago, when technical developments that could potentially be critical for Iggesund and Invercote were discovered. By the mid-2000s, this was known and communicated internally. However, the ideas were temporarily shelved because the company needed to work with a number of other things at the time. In 2008, the idea was picked up again, the tobacco segment being first area to benefit from it. Mallinson described how the thought developed from there:

We saw that it could have positive spin-offs for the packaging and graphics segment, but we first wanted to do the test on tobacco because it was deemed to be more urgent than on the packaging side. Around 2011, we started really thinking that we now need to focus on graphics and packaging, as the future of tobacco is a little bit uncertain, to say the least. So where does our future lie? We clearly saw that our future lies probably more in consumer packaging than it does in either tobacco or in a declining graphics market. [...] So packaging is the focus and in here Invercote needs some technological developments to regain some competitiveness and to position itself in accordance with a market environment that has changed. (Business Director)

Mallinson explained that there are two aspects that influence technical product development: one is listening to external market demands to improve the products, and the other is more concerned with internal development of the functional aspects. In both cases, the marketing function steers the process to “avoid being all things to everyone”. The following quotation illustrates the significant role of technical product development and service in this process.

Over the years, the development of Invercote has been clearly focused on getting the best printability and keeping the traditional qualities that have strengthened the product which enables you for instance to emboss where you need a strong board. So we worked a lot on improving the whiteness, the shade of the whiteness and the surface properties of the board. [...] In addition, the technical development has been much more focused on the mechanical properties of the board, such as runnability in machines and board stiffness. So one is really on the premium side, focused in terms of improvement, and the other is more of a functional aspect. (Business Director)

Einarsson explained that finding something truly new in this industry is tricky, as most things have already been done, from a technical point of view. But during the course of this repositioning process, one came to the conclusion that “with a great deal of confidence, we can actually say, ‘this is like a small revolution’, from a technical standpoint”. He explained what this means for positioning the brand for the future:

Why are we doing it? What business do we target? By transferring customers ‘from here to here’ you don’t make any more money. We want to get a larger customer base. This is quite exciting. We are talking about the positioning, we are talking about the brand itself, we are talking about the messages, we are trying to invent a new language when it comes to environment and sustainability. (Market Communications Director)

In November 2013, project responsables organized a workshop with many employees to discuss the re-writing and re-designing of the brand books. Mallinson explained that this was not done in the previous repositioning project, and now urgently needed to be tackled, considering the major changes that are about to come:

The previous time it was done was in 2001. So it’s very old; well, old. It needed some serious refreshing because we found ourselves with something that was just not at all a fit to the markets that we are starting to target now. (Business Director)

Regarding the project stages, the business director explained that until the summer of 2013, the focus was more on the market research and the product development. During this phase, Iggesund utilized some external consultants to facilitate the market research activities. Henceforth, the market communication is becoming “heavily involved”. However, Mallinson explained that “Iggesund is going to introduce the new product very quietly in the beginning, followed by little communication efforts, and finally concluding with a big communication bang”.

Since February 2014, personnel changes in marketing communication and executive management once again triggered brand strategy adjustments. Jessica Tommila, Iggesund Paperboard’s new Market Communications Director, revealed in personal communication that strategy has shifted since her taking over and implementing changes.

## ***Brand Positioning Outcomes***

Intended brand position outcomes are fortified and strong market positions. Internally, updated brand policy documents were outcomes of manifestations of planned changes and brand perceptions.

## ***Brand Positioning Challenges***

One internal challenge is to mobilize the internal forces to understand how important this project is for the whole company:

Invercote had a very comfortable life for the last 30 years. That comfortable life has not been without significant effort. It probably has been, in some respect, easier for us than for others, true. But you got to wake people up that you need to move now. We can't sit around waiting. Results will only come with considerable effort. (Business Director)

One external challenge is to deal with uncertainty as the company plans to enter market segments with which it has not worked for a long time:

There is some uncertainty because we are going into certain areas we are not so familiar with, segments we have not been working in for a number of years. We are returning to these segments and we've got to keep the morale pretty high. It requires an awful lot of changes: of people, attitudes, habits; different working processes. (Business Director)

Table 18 summarizes empirical findings of episode two at Iggesund business level.

**Table 18**

## Summary of positioning during episode two

Drivers	Action	Outcomes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Considerably tougher market circumstances</li> <li>- Competition has ‘moved on’ and is getting closer, or is catching up</li> <li>- Brand owners getting more knowledgeable, resulting in difficulties to sell on brand trust and reputation only</li> <li>- Purchasing departments getting more powerful and challenging</li> <li>- Regaining competitiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group management starting pre-project, late 2011 and early 2012</li> <li>- Involving whole company instead of only market communications (executive management, product management, R&amp;D, technical service, and sales)</li> <li>- Challenging Iggesund Paperboard’s current marketing strategy</li> <li>- Running change project in three parts since 2013 (mill investment project, product development project, and market project)</li> <li>- Redefining marketing strategy in terms of segmentation, targeting, and services</li> <li>- Collaborating with external consultants to facilitate market research activities</li> <li>- Improving technical and functional product characteristics</li> <li>- Inventing new language for sustainability positioning</li> <li>- Rewriting and redesigning brand books</li> <li>- Involving market communications intensely since summer 2013</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fortifying strong market positions</li> <li>- Updated brand policy documents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mobilizing employees to understand how important repositioning project is for future of the company</li> <li>- Dealing with uncertainty as company plans to enter market segments with which they haven’t worked for a long time</li> </ul>

# Chapter 8 | Analysis

As stated previously, the aim of this thesis is to explore the process of corporate brand positioning in industrial multi-business firms. Grounded in brand positioning, corporate branding, and process theories, I developed a research model to guide the empirical work and to answer the research question, “*How does corporate brand positioning occur over time?*” Having presented, in the previous three chapters, the empirical findings of several corporate and business level brand positioning and repositioning cases (episodes) in the contexts of ABB, Trelleborg, and Holmen, in this chapter I will display the within- and cross-case analysis to answer the research question at hand.

First, I will analyze the findings within each case study context individually. Next, I will look at the insights from the positioning cases in three case company contexts as a whole, highlighting differences and similarities; the overall research question and the sub-questions (the where, when, why, what, and who of change) guide this step in the exploration of the corporate brand positioning processes in multi-business firms. In each positioning case, the process was discussed regarding the following aspects, which derived from the research model: (1) Location, context, and timing of position change; (2) Drivers providing organizations with incentives for brand position change; (3) Actions in the form of organizational actors’ positioning activities and choices; (4) Management challenges during positioning episodes; and (5) Outcomes by means of changes in the corporate brand position principles and perceptions through positioning actions. These aspects, illuminated through corporate and business level perspectives, are taken as a basis for the cross-case analysis that offers answers to the research question.

This analysis is necessary in order to understand the processes that constitute, relate to, and help explain corporate brand positioning. The aim of the analysis is to present patterns of corporate brand positioning dynamics grounded in the empirical material, and to explore the role of organizational change in positioning corporate brands over time; its objective is to identify temporal patterns among event activities and choices seen in the data (Langley, 2011). Moreover, the issue of time (in other words, in what stages positioning occurs) will be taken into account. In the following part I present a descriptive cross-case analysis of corporate brand positioning processes, incidents, and events that occurred in moving the organizations from one state towards another.

# Patterns of Positioning ABB, Trelleborg, and Holmen

## *Positioning ABB Over Time*

### *Episode 1 (1988–1997): Positioning a Multi-Domestic Firm*

Initially, positioning the newly created corporation (ABB) was driven by the merger between Asea, of Sweden, and Brown Boveri, of Switzerland. This initial positioning episode was first and foremost characterized by the need to find a name and visual identity for the new corporation. The company name ABB was selected to acknowledge the heritage of the two former independent corporations that joined forces. Ways of creating an early success story included stressing certain characteristics that ABB should stand for, and strategically communicating achievements and challenges for image generation purposes. The founding CEO's vision was to create an innovative industrial showcase corporation. Despite the challenges of creating an organizational structure that was able to handle the complexity of a huge and growing conglomerate, ABB succeeded in getting the ABB brand name quickly established throughout the world. Positive business press coverage, best company awards, and best-practice case studies about the 'ABB way' of organizing a multinational corporation helped to realize the vision and intended position. Positioning ABB followed a business-driven strategy and understanding of the brand as a name that conveys an image. Since the early and rapid business success that included numerous acquisitions, the brand position was focused on the recognizable red-colored logo; however, company responsables eventually realized that what the ABB brand stood for was quite unclear.

### *Episode 2 (2001–2005): Crisis, Turnaround, and Repositioning*

A number of internal and external factors took ABB into a deep crisis that threatened its existence. Personnel changes in executive management, reactive crisis management and change management eventually saved the corporation. Divesting many non-core businesses and focusing the company on a core business concept consisting of power and automation technologies were major decisions in repositioning ABB as a company. Besides these business-driven repositioning decisions, responsables eventually initiated a project to internally investigate core values and what the brand actually stood for from the perspective of its employees around the globe. These activities, meant to strengthen a 'one company spirit' and solidarity, made it possible to turn cultural and corporate strategy changes into a branding structure that aimed to clarify ABB's position internally and externally. Another goal was to bring the numerous and decentralized managed business units closer to the ABB mother brand pillars by starting deeper conversations between corporate-level brand responsables and communication responsables across businesses and geographies. In the course of the positioning process, executive management and corporate communications



decided to only endorse one brand and to combine the commonly agreed corporate brand pillars with specifically developed marketing messages when positioning and communicating product area market offerings. Finally, a new corporate brand tagline was developed, with the aim of underpinning ABB's newly developed mission, vision, and intended position: *Power and Productivity for a Better World*.

### *Episode 3 (2007–2013): Business Stabilization and Repositioning*

After enduring turbulent times and once business stabilization was achieved, managerial space was created to optimize ABB's brand and position, based on a newly defined business and brand core. Changes in top management; an overly conservative and fragmented brand expression; and fractional competitor brand advancements sent ABB into another episode of updating and repositioning the corporate brand in parallel with a tightened corporate strategy. It became apparent that the actual internal brand work is steered by a small brand management team, with a lot of outsourced brand work being conducted by brand consultants. The responsibility of the operational brand positioning project leader can be described as balancing between internal brand functionality and external agency creativity. It is noteworthy that an experienced consumer brand manager steered the project and acted as a change agent to further transform the company in a more brand-oriented way. Steering internal brand and marketing institutions to diffuse and exchange updated brand knowledge on the basis of an updated positioning strategy was another overarching activity during the most recent positioning process. This emphasis on the internal aspects of positioning the brand through brand education was necessary to change the overall internal perception of the ABB brand; the change involved going from 'logo and name' to manifesting the brand as an all-encompassing obvious system.

The situational context for corporate brand evolution in recurring positioning macro-episodes is found mainly in the company's heritage and organizational structure deeply grounded in decentralization and an entrepreneurial culture. While initial positioning attempts focused on logo-centric initiatives (Episode one), ABB incorporated a value- and identity-centered brand comprehension that was triggered by radical changes during times of crisis (Episode two). Most recently, an all-encompassing brand system was developed and implemented based on a logo-, culture- and visual identity-centric brand comprehension to strengthen the brand's intended position as a leading edge technology brand (Episode three).

### *Positioning ABB Force Measurement's Stressometer Systems*

ABB's products and solutions are the necessary conditions for the corporate brand to exist and be relevant. The role of the business units and product areas in positioning the corporate brand is being true to, and responsible for, what the corporate brand and its intended position stand for. Business-level activities need to ensure that the actual products and services deliver what the corporate brand promises. At the Force

Measurement business unit, brand positioning guidelines are mainly implemented in terms of product design and marketing messages. During product development processes, visual identity guidelines are employed to secure the expression of an ABB product. Following the product development process, positioning activities, such as creating success stories, aim to convey customer-benefit-oriented brand position communication. Positioning is discussed as competitive- and market-oriented type in a product development context, where the brand and its position guidelines come in at different stages. ABB's good reputation is not possible without its products and solutions, as exemplified by the Stressometer product name. Local offices, service, and quality associations with ABB give the business the stability it needs; technology leadership associations unite the ways in which ABB *and* its numerous products, such as Stressometer, are perceived.

### ***Positioning Trelleborg Over Time***

#### *Episode 1 (1999–2005): Brand Strategy Formation and Positioning*

Since its founding in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Trelleborg's development has been characterized by growth, internationalization, and the eventual transformation into an industrial conglomerate and portfolio company with a highly decentralized and entrepreneurial structure. Being confronted with a loss of reputation and trust from the financial community, company responsables enforced a strategic shift near the millennium to reposition Trelleborg towards a core competency of polymer technology involving divestments and acquisitions. This demanded divesting many non-core businesses, and particularly making the automotive industry a core business along with acquiring companies within the rubber and polymer business to lay the foundations for repositioning the corporation. Once business stabilization and refocus on the core were achieved, managerial space was created to improve Trelleborg's portfolio and to implement a brand strategy with a clear focus on the Trelleborg corporate brand, while still allowing for tactical daughter brands. With the help of the corporate brand, Trelleborg aims to globally complement and strengthen positions in selected segments. Dealing with the consequences of a conglomerate-driven strategy in the past caused major difficulties in defining common values, brand elements, and a differentiated position. Trelleborg also utilized the newly created business concept, 'seal, damp, and protect', as the foundation for the brand, adding the words 'reliability' and 'innovation'. This resulted in a brand promise and intended position aimed at delivering 'innovative and reliable solutions that seal, damp and protect'. This corporate brand positioning episode actually coincided with brand strategy formation efforts and included workshops to define the Trelleborg core values, create brand policy documents, align brand and corporate strategy to take care of acquisitions and divestments from a positioning perspective, and to translate a newly defined brand positioning strategy into a new corporate campaign to communicate

the intended position. A main challenge was to position the corporate brand given the vast amount of different business units, product areas, and business models.

*Episode 2 (2011–2014): Strategic Reorientation and Repositioning*

Recently, another strategic move changed the corporate structure and business. Changes in organizational structure, as well as not sufficiently well answered brand-positioning-related questions were driving developments to reposition the corporate brand in conjunction with a tightened corporate strategy. It is worth noting that an experienced consumer brand manager steered the project operationally and acted as a change agent to further transform the company in a more brand-oriented way. After initially pitching for this project internally, and deciding to work together with external brand consultants as collaboration partners, an updated intended position of the Trelleborg brand was roughly sketched before entering the brand analysis stage. The result was the creation of a draft of a repositioned Trelleborg corporate brand based on internal and external research, as well as on input from committees such as Marketing Council, Brand Board, and cross-functional corporate level workshops. While creating guidelines for a new value-based and value-focused position, project responsables decided to create material that incorporated standardized, universally relevant as well as customized business-specific brand position elements. After going through several rounds of executive management buy-in and approval, testing the linguistic impact of the new brand position material on the business area presidents, and conducting further workshops with businesses-unit delegates to pre-align planned changes, the updated brand position strategy was eventually approved by the CEO and the executive management group. This was followed by selecting a pilot segment to test the application of the new brand platform and position elements, running internal strategic marketing training sessions to facilitate implementation and understanding of changes, working with individual business units in workshop format to link their value proposition and positioning strategy to the overall group intended position, and driving the adaptation and implementation of the new strategy to several non-customer stakeholders, based on corporate workshops. Project leaders were challenged with finding a balance between central and peripheral actions within a decentralized organizational structure with nearly autonomously-run units; they needed to secure the utilization and alignment of business units with corporate brand position and platform, to be able to leverage the corporate brand for business-level positioning.

Trelleborg's situational context for corporate brand evolution in reoccurring positioning macro-episodes is also found mainly in the company's heritage and organizational structure, which are deeply grounded in decentralization and an entrepreneurial culture. After withdrawing from a conglomerate and portfolio strategy that did not focus on Trelleborg as the corporate brand, initial positioning attempts focused on a value- and identity-centered brand comprehension triggered by loss of reputation and trust from external stakeholders. The most recent repositioning

episode focused on developing the corporate brand and its intention to change brand perception from a 'functional solutions provider' to a 'value-adding and benefit-adding brand', strengthening its position as a world leader in polymer technology.

### *Positioning Trelleborg Sealing Solutions' Rubore Offerings*

Trelleborg's products and solutions are the necessary conditions for the corporate brand to exist and be relevant. The role of the business units and product areas in positioning the corporate brand is being true to, and responsible for, what the corporate brand and its intended position stand for. Business-level activities ensure that the actual products and services deliver what the corporate brand promises. Trelleborg Sealing Solutions Kalmar BU has a proven track record of being the leading and preferred supplier for brake shims and damping solutions. From its entrepreneurial beginnings, the company focused on being a full solution and quality service provider. When Trelleborg acquired the company during the 1990s, the founding name Rubore was kept as a company and product name. During episode one, corporate brand strategy formation and positioning, the company lost Rubore as a company name, but continued to leverage the Rubore brand reputation for product development and branding in brake-related areas, together with the Trelleborg corporate brand. The business unit utilizes the Trelleborg brand name for the positioning purposes of non-brake shim-related products and solutions. Brand positioning activities and choices are essentially embedded in product and solution development, differentiating the brand by offering customers in-house and state-of-the-art testing facilities; responding to complex customer needs and demands quickly; and using such arguments to differentiate from the competition to be able to make customers pay premium prices. By coupling and communicating the success of the company's end-customer (for example, car brands) to its solutions, or writing technical white papers in collaboration with customers, the company strengthens its position and image of a technology leader in its field of brake shims and damping solutions.

### *Positioning Holmen Over Time*

#### *Positioning Holmen*

Holmen owns strong market positions within its business areas, but does not engage in specific market-related positioning activities on corporate level. However, business areas were feeling the need to be part of the strong group; a drastically changing market environment and consumption habits resulting in less usage of paper, along with a rise of information technology and new media habits, put pressure on Holmen's product-oriented paper and paperboard businesses. Therefore, Holmen invested in being perceived as 'the seal of guarantee' for its businesses by streamlining its corporate brand logo, utilizing its self-sufficient business model to construct a

unique sustainability position, and by telling a polished Holmen story for cross-group image and position building. Recent developments in defining cross-group core values aim to help gathering strength across Holmen and its businesses and nourishing a sense of ‘belonging’. Nevertheless, concrete positioning projects remain the task of the business areas such as Iggesund Paperboard with its product brand families Invercote and Incada.

### *Episode 1 (2006–2008): Communication-Driven Repositioning*

Since the Invercote and Incada brand families rank as the strongest brands in the European paperboard packaging market, repositioning them was not driven by crisis factors that required urgent responses. Instead, the goal was to grow profitability and market share and to reinforce the brand’s emotional appeal, which had become too ‘sterile’ in the eyes of the new responsables for branding and market communication. The goal was to build upon an already very strong brand and to develop it further by eventually creating a new Invercote brand typography, along with adding a fourth brand value to the brand, and ‘verbalizing’ the brand. After succeeding in buying-in to the CEO and the executive management group, the project leader chose to not fully inform sales and mill staff too early in the repositioning process, due to confidentiality reasons. Once brand analysis activities such as internal and external research and perceptual position mapping had been performed, changed-position elements of the Invercote brand emerged. Repositioning Invercote then made project responsables realize that Iggesund’s second product brand, Incada, also needed to be updated in order to adjust intended position differences. Emergent strategic choices included changing the Incada logo, imagery, and tagline, to slightly upgrade the position of Invercote as ‘super premium’ and Incada as ‘functional premium’, adjusting price differences accordingly. Workshops were conducted towards the end of the project, when market communication responsables had mostly decided on changes but still needed to sell them to executive management for final approval. Award-winning brand campaigns followed, to convey the intended positions of Invercote and Incada.

### *Episode 2 (2011–2014): Technology-Driven Repositioning*

In order to fortify the strong market positions that Iggesund owns, company responsables decided to launch another repositioning project of its flagship product brand, Invercote. This was a necessary response to tougher market circumstances, competitors getting closer or even catching up, and brand owners getting more knowledgeable, which increased the difficulty of selling solely on the basis of brand trust and reputation. Compared to the brand’s communication-focused repositioning activities in the previous episode, the current episode involves the whole company, including executive management, product management, technical service, sales, and market communications. Thus, a challenge was to mobilize internal forces to understand how important the repositioning project is for the future of the whole company. Challenging questions needed to be asked internally regarding Iggesund’s

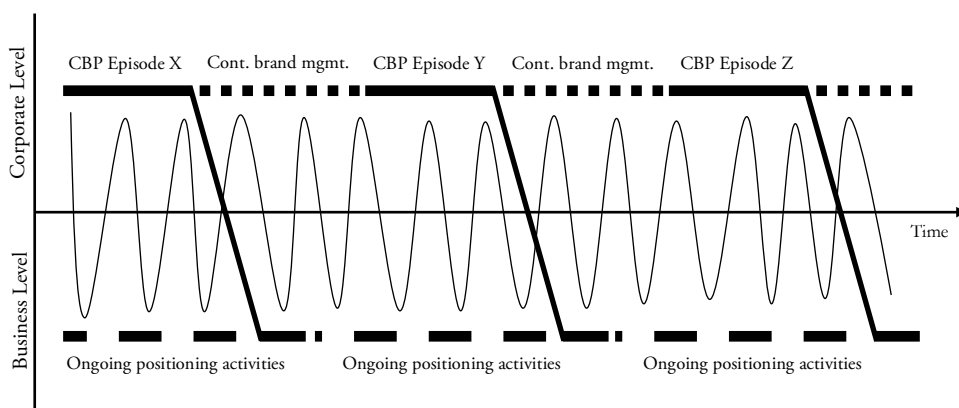
current marketing strategy, resulting in decisions to redefine marketing strategy in terms of segmentation, targeting, position, and services. Since early 2014, personnel changes in marketing communication and executive management once again triggered the need for brand positioning strategy to be adjusted.

## Cross-Case Patterns of Corporate Brand Positioning

### *Location and Timing*

Reaching a better understanding of where positioning processes occur over time is important and relevant, as we know too little about what happens if numerous business units and product areas need to be coordinated under the corporate brand in multi-business firms. It has been mentioned elsewhere that the position of a corporate brand and the position of its products are connected with the role of the product's positioning strategy to promote specific attributes, benefits, or attitudes, while the corporate brand should specify the ultimate value (Kapferer, 2012). Yet, empirical research has been sparse when it comes to the processual dynamics to establish a clear and meaningful corporate brand position and the interaction between corporate level and business units over time.

As for this shortcoming and the question of where and when position change occurs, the findings from the case studies suggest that position change processes take place in an iterative fashion on both corporate and business levels (see Figure 27).



**Figure 27**

Corporate brand positioning across firm levels and over time

The corporate brand can be seen as having a synergy-driven reciprocal support function. While positioning processes on corporate level intend to clarify what the brand should stand for, product positioning processes on business level aim at living up to the overall promise and intended position. Macro-episodes of corporate brand positioning (CBP) on corporate level (solid lines, upper part) occur occasionally, before the activities that constitute positioning dissolve into day-to-day and continuous brand management and communication activities (dashed lines, upper part); these happen once agreement about where to position and how to succeed is achieved. Such episodes on corporate level show high interdependency between brand strategy and corporate strategy. This means that efforts to change an intended corporate brand position mostly followed, and responded to, changes in overall corporate strategy. Positioning episodes initially start with the realization of a need to change position; this happens before attempts are made to redefine the position with the necessary means in the course of the project. Such corporate-level change episodes trigger internal position changes and implementation processes (solid lines connecting the upper and lower parts). Likewise, business-level positioning projects also result from initial perspective change processes. Then, managerial attempts are made to embed the newly developed propositions in ongoing product development processes (semi-dashed lines, lower part) and concrete product manifestations for entering new market segments, market regions, or simply improving and defending existing market positions. Intra-organizational marketing networks, brand taskforces, and similar institutions and their activities (curved lines alternating between upper and lower parts) symbolize the occasional, co-constitutive nature of corporate brand positioning over time.

At ABB corporate level, the latest repositioning process started during 2007, with the goal of updating and rejuvenating the brand (Episode three). An earlier positioning process started around 2002, as a response to a deep crisis (Episode two). The first attempts to position ABB were made after the merger between Asea, of Sweden, and Brown Boveri, of Switzerland, with the vision to position ABB as the industrial showcase corporation (Episode one). At Trelleborg corporate level, the latest repositioning process started in 2011, with the goal of updating and rejuvenating the brand (Episode two). An earlier strategic repositioning process started around the millennium, with attempts to focus Trelleborg on a core competency and away from a conglomerate, responding to a crisis that developed during the 1990s. This phase of positioning the corporation came along with brand strategy formation attempts (Episode one). At Holmen corporate level, a concrete brand positioning episode could not be discovered, but for predictable reasons; structural changes and divestments led to organizational restructuring around the millennium. Moreover, market changes resulting in less usage of paper, rise of information technology, and new media habits forced the corporation to reinvent and adjust their corporate strategy. In facing the mostly market-driven challenges, business areas felt the need to be part of the strong group that should function as a seal of guarantee.

Brand positioning regularly reoccurred over time on business level, as strategic position decisions were embedded in product development processes for entering new market segments or defending existing market positions with product and service solutions. Responding to position changes made on corporate level, either in the form of resisting or accepting the proposed changes, highlights additional timings within the context of positioning change on business level. The relationship between change and continuity was characterized by continuity, rather than by change. Changes were primarily externally- and market-driven, as opposed to internally- and culture-driven.

## *Drivers*

It is important to understand why positioning processes take place, as we know too little about drivers of change to explain the need for positioning and repositioning corporate brands over time. The macro-episodes of positioning processes that have been empirically discovered eventually initiate the question of why corporate brand positioning occurs. Findings show three broad patterns of corporate brand positioning drivers: *modifications in business ownership*, *changes in the external environment*, and *altered internal conditions*. The findings nuance and extend these corporate-level categories with further depth, and add the driver perspective from business-level thinking and acting. Based on the case studies in this research, corporate drivers mirror business-level drivers, though in a more specific and less aggregate way than on corporate level. This indicates that business unit and product area positioning approaches evolve mainly from the actual operational business and the necessity to differentiate from the competition in a particular market segment, as many respondents revealed. The following section discusses business ownership, and external and internal drivers in more detail. Table 19 offers a systematic overview of broad positioning-driver categories, detailed driver patterns, and provides corresponding illustrative empirical examples from corporate and business levels.

### *Business Ownership Drivers*

A major influence to positioning and repositioning on corporate level are *mergers*, along with *acquisitions*, *divestments*, or *joint ventures*. From the perspective of the business units and product areas investigated, business ownership drivers of change come into play when the corporate brand acquires daughter brands to strengthen its portfolio. Corporate brands merging and subsidiaries following, in terms of brand change, is a second pattern of the legal driver category.

### *External Drivers*

Findings show that corporate brand positioning projects start when *competitors start initiatives to reposition*, resulting in reactive activities. Another visible external driver in the positioning cases is the realization by corporate responsables that the *value and*



*reputation of the organization has fallen* in the eyes of external stakeholders. Moreover, *crisis elements*, such as *previous poor performance or bad publicity*, are recognized patterns and require distancing and starting all over again – including repositioning the brand representing the organization. Another external driver for corporate-level positioning and repositioning were *globalization and emerging markets-related developments*. Additionally, *digital developments* (changes in communication and technology) were also seen as external developments forcing corporate brands to respond. Finally, *global races for talents* force organizations to differentiate. From the perspective of the business units and product areas investigated, major external driving patterns were: adapting to changes in the marketplace, attracting future employees with a strong brand, pressure from competition, constant improvement of products and solutions and customer problem-driven solution specification. Changes are business-driven, as margins need to be improved continuously. In that sense, the pressure originates from the financial market.

### *Internal Drivers*

A new *corporate structure and strategy as well as vision and values* were elements driving the positioning process of a corporate brand. Most cases also illustrate the need to reposition when the *current image of the corporate brand has become outdated*. Moreover, the finding that *newly appointed leaders wishing to put their mark on the organization*, thus driving a repositioning process, adds to the internal dimension. Newly hired managers coming into the organization and acting as change agents for corporate brand positioning projects can be initially seen as driving positioning projects; they first learn how to interpret the social infrastructure of their new work environment from its existing members, leading to a resocialization of the current actors of the community of corporate brand practitioners and the reinforcement of existing practice. However, change agents also questioned their new environment due to their low socialization to the new community, creating “the potential for its reevaluation and adaption” (Jarzabkowski, 2004, p. 537). Exploring episodes of strategic position change has shown this phenomenon of change agents driving repositioning projects.

Other internal drivers were *diagnosis of further professionalizing and improving branding practices* and *filling gaps from previous positioning efforts*. Finally, *climbing the value chain* by means of highlighting solutions and customer benefits has been prevalent in all most-recent cases. Trying to skip parts in the value chain in order to be able to pull end-customers towards demanding the brand’s solutions is the corresponding driver from the perspective of the business units and product areas investigated. Further noteworthy patterns are: improving financial results for the mother corporation, learning from failures of previous positioning approaches, culture and values (such as ‘never give up’), and brand-driven solution specifications for generating a business that does not yet exist (market-driving behavior).

**Table 19**

## Positioning driver patterns for corporate and business levels

Driver category	Driver pattern	Corporate level example	Business level example
Business ownership	Mergers	ASEA and Brown Boveri became ABB (Episode one)	Post-merger integration for Stressometer trademark changed from ASEA to ABB
	Acquisitions, divestments	Trelleborg JV with Freudenberg fueled change (Episode two)	Trelleborg acquiring Rubore (now Trelleborg Sealing Solutions Kalmar)
External	Competitor initiatives	ABB repositioning as a response to competitors starting to engage in branding activities (Episode three)	Iggesund Paperboard repositioning in 2012 as a response to competitors catching up and increasing the pressure (Episode two)
	Crisis situations	ABB repositioning due to a crisis questioning the existence of the corporation (Episode two)	Resisting to changes imposed by corporate level that seem inadequate as illustrated at Force Measurement (Episode two)
	Market & customer changes	ABB repositioning due to increased importance of global markets and emerging market developments (Episode three)	Customer-driven solution specification allowing Rubore to differentiate and charge premium prices thereby responding to the challenge of commoditized markets
	Digital media developments	Digital media developments requiring changes to the Trelleborg brand (Episode two)	Iggesund Paperboard utilizing digital channels and innovative brand campaigns to realize its intended brand position
	Global race for talents	ABB intending to be an attractive employer in a highly competitive market for talents (Episode three)	Being attractive for talents is essential to keep competitive edge as for example at ABB Force Measurement.
	Stakeholder professionalism	Transparency developments (such as CSR) and stakeholder professionalism requiring Trelleborg to sharpen its position (Episode two)	Increased professionalism in purchasing departments forces Iggesund Paperboard to communicate their solutions' value-added aspects
	Improving financial margins	Shareholders and financial community demand constantly increasing value generation, while the ABB brand helps to create space for the business to achieve this goal (Episode three)	Being profit-driven to constantly improve margins by financial markets makes alterations necessary in how to position products and solutions.
	Internal	Corporate structure, strategy, vision, values	Trelleborg refined its corporate strategy by divesting most parts of the Automotive BA into a JV, thus opening up the process of brand repositioning (Episode two)
Outdated image		Repositioning ABB was necessary as the brand image was assessed outdated and old-fashioned (Episode three)	ABB visual identity (developed on corporate level) drives integration into Stressometer product development
Climbing the value chain		Trelleborg tries to change its perception of a functional solutions provider to highlighting its solutions far-reaching benefits (Episode two)	Iggesund Paperboard tries to reach brand owners with its repositioned Invercote brand beyond its traditional customer base consisting of printers and converters
Personnel changes		Newly hired managers coming into the organization and acting as change agents	Newly hired managers coming into the organization and acting as change agents

### *Reactive and Proactive, Urgent and Non-Urgent Position Change*

A general cross-case finding is that corporate- and business-level drivers of positioning episodes are not exclusively business ownership-, external-, or internal-related, but include several of these instead. Furthermore, such drivers can have *reactive* or *proactive*, *urgent* or *non-urgent* characteristics (Miller et al., 2014). Reactive change elements can be described as happening after a crisis and in response to external or internal pressures for change. Case evidence shows that positioning episodes are reactive when business ownership drivers are in place (ABB episode one; Trelleborg episodes one and two) or when external drivers are in place (ABB episodes two and three; Trelleborg episodes one and two). Proactive change can be described as happening before a crisis and through believing in the need for brand change and enhancement to meet future competitive demands (as in ABB's episode three; Trelleborg's episodes one and two).

As for urgency characteristics, urgent cases of brand position change have a specified launch deadline for the revised brand and its position, while non-urgent cases have no implementation deadline (Miller et al., 2014). The positioning cases covered in this thesis were first and foremost non-urgent, as the necessary time was granted for position reformulation and implementation (ABB phase three; Trelleborg phase two). An exception was the merger between Asea and Brown Boveri and quickly finding a new name for the corporation, which eventually became ABB. Additionally, ABB's crisis situation near the millennium (episode two) forced leaders to redefine its business and brand position strategy without losing too much time.

### ***Corporate-Level Actions***

It has been argued throughout this thesis that we need better insights into how processes of positioning unfold. This sub-chapter is an attempt to better understand the 'black-box' of events, activities, choices, and challenges that constitute both the brand position planning episodes and its implementation efforts. The chapter essentially covers the aspect of change, which helps understand how events, activities, and choices of intended position strategizing and implementation develop. Process patterns show both *episodic* (infrequent, discontinued, or intentional events) and *continuous* (small, uninterrupted, simultaneously created events) change elements (Weick & Quinn, 1999; Pettigrew, Woodman, & Cameron, 2001). Episodic positioning events are *kick-off* or *verification workshops* run by corporate level but including business level participants. The importance of such strategy-away-days is illustrated below:

We had an offsite, where we looked at various things and spent an entire afternoon basically brainstorming about the main elements that would constitute a statement, a nice tagline. We worked back and forth and it was good fun to begin with and in the end I collected their [80 top managers'] one-sentence [tagline ideas]. I went back to our office in Oerlikon that night and wrote the line: *Power and Productivity for a Better World*. And we trademarked it and I am very happy that they kept it, because it's a powerful statement and it came out of this branding process. (ABB, head of corporate communications)

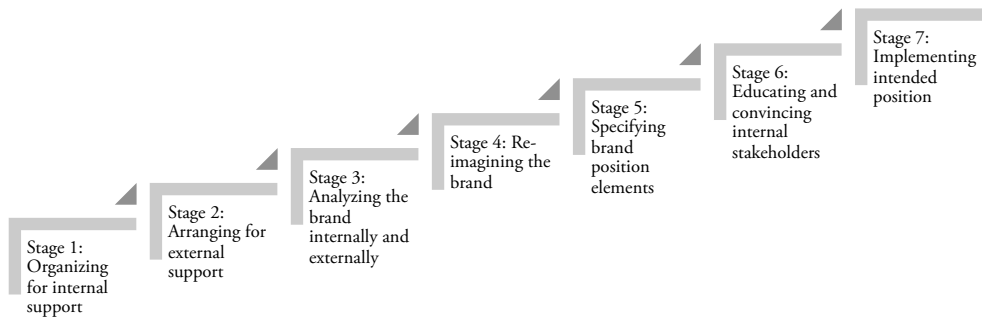
Another micro-episodic element is the *external consulting input* structuring the process and providing creative input. Moreover, *internal and external research* activities, aimed at learning about brand consistencies and inconsistencies across the group, stand for an episodic element in the positioning process. Continuous positioning events are the numerous incidents of *internal brand change communicating* on various levels across the organization throughout the process:

If there is one thing that is absolutely key, it is presenting, discussing, aligning, and selling this to people on a continuous basis (Trelleborg, global brand director).

Further workshops of internal marketing, marketing education, and brand networks, for example, facilitate these actions. While an initial kick-off workshop signals that a change is going to happen, following workshops should facilitate continuous change through communicating intended changes and discussing impact.

#### *The Seven Stages of Corporate Brand Positioning Action*

I identified seven stages of corporate brand positioning action (represented by distinct management activities and events) across the studied cases: (1) *Organizing for internal support*, (2) *Arranging for external support*, (3) *Analyzing the brand internally and externally*, (4) *Re-imagining the brand*, (5) *Specifying brand position elements*, (6) *Educating and convincing internal stakeholders*, and (7) *Implementing intended position*. Figure 28 illustrates these corporate brand positioning stages.



**Figure 28**

Positioning stages towards implementation over time

### Stage 1: Organizing for internal support

During stage one, corporate brand project leaders prepared initial content and goals ideas of an envisioned positioning process, to secure a successful preliminary buy-in with superiors and executive management before officially starting the project. Involving superiors, such as the group's head of corporate communication, on high-level only, highlights the political dimension of corporate brand positioning where superiors act as a political transmitter, communicating between CEO and corporate brand project leaders. A Trelleborg example illustrates the importance of this initial buy-in:

In general my principle was: stay a couple of steps ahead of them [superiors and CEO], make it tangible, and link it to the business. Again, they need to be convinced, otherwise it won't happen. (Trelleborg, global brand director)

The key challenge during this initial stage is to convince superiors and to eventually succeed in CEO buy-in, to enable a successful strategic positioning process to follow. Considering the context of the case companies, it is essential, from the start, to convince and engage non-brand knowledgeable business managers with an engineering background.

### Stage 2: Arranging for external support

This stage was characterized by the choice of collaborating with external brand consultants. Deciding to outsource parts of the positioning work in order to develop a

positioning strategy is primarily based on three criteria: (a) lack of internal resources in terms of expertise and manpower, (b) inspirational and creative value provision, (c) political reasons in terms of a track record of expertise and an 'outsider perspective' to the corporation. The role of the external consultants is to give input on how to facilitate and structure the process of positioning the corporate brand. Respondents underlined that the actual repositioning work is then done internally, without external agency support. Moreover, the deliberate choice to reduce the direct contact between brand consultants and company executives aims at preventing conflicts between creative and business mindsets, while corporate brand project managers act as a compensating pole between the two. The following ABB example illustrates this point:

You hire an agency because sometimes you want crazy ideas, but you also have to understand that some ideas are just crazy and nothing you really need. Maria [brand manager] was really fantastic to balance creativity and what makes sense for ABB from a branding point of view. (ABB, head of corporate communications)

The key challenge during the second stage is to find a trustworthy and reliable partner for the project; a partner that is able to provide expertise and guidance.

### Stage 3: Analyzing the brand internally and externally

Brand analysis activities occurred in four parts and were steered both by the corporate brand management team and the external brand consultants.

First, current corporate brand position elements were reviewed, covering elements such as mission, vision, promise, core values, or communication themes across all brand touchpoints through which stakeholders experience the corporate brand. This activity's goal was to understand what type of position the brand currently conveyed, so as to know what needed to be changed in the future.

Second, a competitor analysis was conducted to assess competitor's brands and their intended positions. However, a choice needed to be made regarding the depth of this exercise. Considering the structural organizational context of ABB and Trelleborg, with many business units serving different industries and segments, the choice to only select global competitors looked to secure feasibility for points-of-parity and points-of-difference analyses; this necessarily simplified positioning knowledge during external brand audit and analysis. As a consequence, brand analysis information appeared more robust and definitive than it would have if presented in more complicated forms, as an ABB example illustrates:

We have a few major competitors globally and we compared with them. And all the local ones, you have to ignore them at this level of analysis. We do localize in the implementation, but not too much at the high strategic level because then you will never get it done. You need to really focus on the big players. (ABB, global brand director)

Third, corporate brand management teams chose to conduct external research to inform the strategic process of position finding. This activity can take the form of brand image and perception surveys, as in the context of ABB, or by using available image and perception material from business units, as in the context of Trelleborg. In general, choices were made regarding the usefulness of exploiting more (ABB context) or less (Trelleborg context) external market research initially as a basis to re-vision the brand.

Finally, internal research was conducted in terms of cross-group key executive management interviews. The idea behind it is to ensure a strong business foundation for an updated corporate brand position to be implemented later in the process. The internal research activities at Trelleborg also reveal the choice of the project leaders to deliberately phrase the interview questions in a very business-oriented way. By intentionally omitting brand or marketing terms that may be perceived as too superficial, project leaders wanted to secure the support from powerful business-level managers who think in rather rational business terms.

The key challenge during this stage is making the appropriate decisions concerning brand analysis prioritizations, due to limited resources. There is also a dilemma of inclusiveness; on the one hand, seeing the need to add competitive positioning aspects on corporate brand level positioning besides aspirational aspects; on the other hand, knowing this would not be as relevant to some businesses of the group as to others.

#### Stage 4: Re-imagining the brand

This stage consisted of organizing group-wide marketing workshops to ‘officially’ start corporate brand positioning projects. The goal is to inform organizational members with marketing-related functions about the goals of the project, as well as to gather useful information from them. Activities conducted included self-image and identity exercises, discussing current positioning approaches on corporate and business levels, and debating future positioning scenarios. However, the extent of already knowing the preferred outcome in terms of an intended position varies across cases. In the latest positioning case at Trelleborg, business-level managers were actively involved in the process of position discussion and finding. At ABB, the rationale of facilitating a group-wide global workshop was based on letting business-level managers verify and discuss position scenarios and a set of chosen brand attributes that had already been designed. The choice of inviting and appointing brand delegates for group-wide marketing network forums, like the kick-off workshop at Trelleborg, has the objective of transferring and diffusing brand position specifications to respective business units. Another choice of explicitly selecting business area and business-unit brand delegates to educate others on brand changes was to ensure coherent understanding for future implementation, and to successfully buy-in down-stream. The following Trelleborg example illustrates the importance of internal buy-in:

There could be a quicker way of doing things, which would mean less hours spent, but you would have many more difficulties creating the understanding internally, creating this support and buy-in, and it's essential of course that the buy-in is created and that the things we develop are liked; especially among Swedish companies where the buy-in is created on consensus, rather than with power. (Trelleborg, external brand consultant)

In principal, the decision of appointing brand delegates relates to educating about the brand to ensure coherent understanding for future implementation. Corporate level workshops were also organized at Trelleborg, consisting of diverse corporate level functions such as Human Resource, Public Relations, and Investor Relations, to run in parallel to the business-focused workshop. This choice was based on the rationale that aimed to better integrate with various corporate level functions to discuss strategic positioning and stakeholder communication. The goal was to 'side-stream' buy-in on corporate level across functions, in addition to the goal of aligning commercial business-level positions with desired corporate level specifications.

The key challenge during this stage is to create a close link between corporate and business levels from the start, through finding and developing a corporate brand position that is relevant for all. Finding a brand story that is convincing for all collaborators and relevant for several target audiences, without being too narrow or too broad in scope, exemplifies this challenge. Coping with unequally distributed marketing knowledge and branding sophistication across the diverse businesses or geographical regions also proved to be a major challenge.

#### Stage 5: Specifying brand position elements

Narrowing down differentiating elements for an envisioned future brand position and drawing initial conclusions were major activities in this stage. Based on updated brand position drafts, communication themes were developed in this stage of the process, with a focus on defining and articulating value-based messages for various organizational levels. One set of messages was designed to be relevant for the corporate brand universally, while other sets were customized to cater to business, segment, or industry-specific brand position purposes. Besides these unit-specific adaptations to enhance relevance, the ABB context also highlights the potential choice of allowing a certain amount of flexibility in regional implementation, due to specific cultural elements being considered to increase relevance. The goal of testing new brand position statement ideas on selected business units and product areas during this stage is to make the high-level phrasings of a new corporate brand position more tangible. Moreover, visually translating the updated brand platform and position elements is a reoccurring pattern. In addition, digital strategy elements are incorporated in the refinement exercise to ensure a contemporary brand perception. At ABB, an interactive online dialogue channel aims to centrally help the bundling of country, business, and product-level communication. Finally, turning the intended



brand position into applicable corporate stories was done, in the case of Trelleborg, by means of designing a digital. By explaining the brand's products and solutions to website visitors, the showroom tries to convey the intended brand position. Such digital visualization devices can be understood as value-creation attempts, as their main goal is not only to activate diverse target groups, but also to win them over:

We have realized that it would be a good idea to make sure that we expose the customer to the full offering of the Trelleborg Group. That's what we aimed to do with the digital showroom. [...] Taking the customer on a journey from space to seabed, and leveraging the most attractive, interesting and powerful products and solutions and applications where we as a group play a significant role. (Trelleborg, global brand director)

The key challenge during this stage is to convince businesses to change during a positioning project, without having a proper mandate in a decentralized organization. Avoiding brand position dilution is essential. Dilution can happen through too much compromising, which can take place when everyone suddenly feels they understand and have expertise in branding, and desire to give input on linguistic or visual details.

#### Stage 6: Educating and convincing internal stakeholders

Presenting the project's progress to the CEO and the executive management group are key events that occurred several times during the planning process. Gathering input from the group is key in order to proceed in the process, especially considering the role of the CEO as the ultimate brand responsible in a corporate brand management context. Consequential activities of these executive management reporting meetings are processes of adjusting and improving brand platform and position elements to consider the concerns and priorities of top management. The important role of top management in convincing the organization is highlighted in the following quotation and example:

So bringing everyone to a similar level of knowledge involved quite a lot of travelling, many presentations, discussions, and workshops. It took quite some time to create the awareness and develop the understanding internally. [...] After that and with the help of the senior management, it was much easier. (ABB, global brand director)

In the Trelleborg context, the corporate brand manager introduced initial project work-in-progress results via forums such as global management conferences to spark interest among top managers across the organization. In addition, further group-wide marketing workshops for verifying and fine-tuning brand position elements were conducted at Trelleborg. This aimed to secure a strong bottom-up grounding of the planned changes, while at the same time 'upstream' buy-in was still being continuously negotiated and developed. Communicating the value of the updated brand position and educating managers across the group about the latest marketing knowledge is repeatedly executed in order to secure understanding of new corporate

brand position elements and its planned impact. At ABB, newly appointed regional brand ambassadors aimed to diffuse and control updated brand specifications regionally. Essentially, project leaders repeatedly engaged in practices of justifying ‘worth’ (Stark, 2010), becoming architects and designing the networks and infrastructure to make strategic brand change possible. The following quotation illustrates this point on behalf of Trelleborg:

Clearly, if the car is rolling in that direction we won’t pull the breaks and back up again. It’s just a matter of how and when we do the rest. If we have had a management team with more maturity in the branding field and if I have had a bigger mandate, that would not be the model we would choose. But now that’s the way the world looks, so we need to make the best out of the situation. [...] We are working extremely hard with the internal anchoring [...] It is a process that needs to take place in steps and requires a lot of political massaging and tweaking. (Trelleborg, global brand director)

The key challenge in this stage is to maintain the right balance between empowered bottom-up processes and strict top-down processes in developing position strategies. Keeping a high level of internal awareness and creating lasting brand engagement by constant communication adds to this challenge.

#### Stage 7: Implementing intended position

Preparing brand position documents, such as publishing brand books, brand stories, and platform documents for internal use started once the positioning project was fully approved by executive management. Addressing the updated brand position continuously through diverse internal channels, such as intranet, company magazines, or physical meetings, has the goal of keeping a high level of awareness and importance. To make sure that the newly decided position for the brand was not just an empty claim, pilot implementation workshops and discussions with selected business units were arranged. The aim is to link the updated corporate brand position to the specific products and solutions of the selected business unit or product area, as an ABB example shows:

We constructed a very simple kind of branding schematic that worked all the way down to ‘how do you actually put together business stories about products’ and ‘what are the marketing messages that you need to support the core brand proposition and where will you get support yourself’. (ABB, head of corporate communications)

Carving out the specific role of the new brand position and platform for different corporate-level stakeholder groups ensures consistent messaging across group functions. Turning intended brand positions into applicable business stories, on the foundational ground of the overall corporate story, is exemplified by ABB’s ‘Efficient solutions for a dynamic world’ corporate messaging, or Trelleborg’s digital showroom allowing visitors enter the ‘World of Trelleborg’ to discover the benefits of the corporate brand’s products and solutions ‘from space to seabed’. Finally, the utilization of external events such as Investor Relations meetings or group-wide

industry fairs are a notable pattern of testing internal and external reactions to the new or updated and communicated brand position. Such initial external implementation test-runs can function as game changers for further support and group-wide implementation of the project.

The key challenge concerns managing the different levels of pace of various organizational groups in progressing towards implementing planned brand position-changes. Making sure businesses are able to leverage the updated corporate brand position for specific business-solution position customization is another stage-specific challenge. During this stage, the difficulty is to find the right amount of 'pull' (that is, independent implementation) and 'push' (that is, dependent implementation) elements.

### *Summary*

The two corporate level case contexts of ABB and Trelleborg specifically stressed the time-consuming nature of positioning processes, mostly justified by continuous buy-in attempts on several levels (political dimension). The risk of losing momentum due to project delays caused by many rounds of discussions (to find consensus), along with approval-waiting loops, influences the pace of change. In this respect, pace of change is also coupled with the risk of brand dilution due to too many compromises (such as repeatedly discussing linguistic or visual details) during positioning stages. Patterns across cases show that a way of keeping a positive momentum once the change project has started but is stuck in approval-waiting loops, is through internal brand and marketing network events (for example, presentations, meetings, or workshops) to keep a high level of urgency and necessity. Such internal momentum-keeping activities (in other words, 'brand preaching') are a means to create legitimacy for communicating a certain brand re-vision rationale during a project of strategic brand change towards different internal stakeholders. Convincing and engaging business managers with an engineering background (and less knowledgeable about branding issues) proved to be a continuous challenge. Internal activities are complemented by external momentum-keeping activities (for instance, fairs). Using digital strategy aspects as a means (in other words, , keeping momentum) to an end (that is, creating a stronger or altered brand position) is a notable pattern of facilitating brand change. Nevertheless, brand change leaders needed to cope with unequally distributed marketing knowledge and branding sophistication across the diverse businesses or geographical regions. Despite such unequally distributed skills and capabilities, project leaders saw the need to alternate between pull and push management approaches to win internal manager and employee commitment. Finally, this is important to secure the utilization of an updated positioning approach on business and product levels.

Table 20 summarizes patterns of corporate brand positioning in multi-business firms.

**Table 20****Corporate brand positioning stages**

Stages	Key activities	Key choices	Key challenges
(1) Organizing for internal support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preparing initial content and goals for intended corporate brand position</li> <li>- Buying-in to superiors, CEO, and executive management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involving superiors only on high-level</li> <li>- Let superiors take role of political connector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Convincing superiors</li> <li>- Succeeding in initial CEO buy-in</li> <li>- Dealing with politics</li> </ul>
(2) Arranging for external support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organizing brand consultancy pitches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Partly outsourcing positioning work to external consultants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Finding trustworthy and reliable partner for positioning project</li> </ul>
(3) Analyzing the brand internally and externally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reviewing current corporate brand position elements</li> <li>- Conducting competitor analyses</li> <li>- Conducting external research to inform the positioning process</li> <li>- Conducting internal research (such as cross-group key executive manager interviews)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Selecting only global competitors to secure feasibility for comparisons</li> <li>- Deciding upon the ratio of external and internal research</li> <li>- Phrasing internal interview questions as 'business-oriented' to facilitate acceptance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Balancing competitive and aspirational positioning aspects on corporate level</li> <li>- Finding optimal level of relevance for as many businesses as possible</li> </ul>
(4) Re-imagining the brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organizing group-wide marketing workshops to discuss intended position scenarios</li> <li>- Doing self-image and identity exercises</li> <li>- Discussing current positioning approaches across levels</li> <li>- Debating future scenarios</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appointing brand delegates to transfer and diffuse brand position changes to respective business units</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating close link between corporate and business levels</li> <li>- Finding appropriate balance between participation (pull) and policing (push)</li> </ul>
(5) Specifying brand position elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Narrowing down differentiating elements for intended brand position</li> <li>- Producing linguistic drafts</li> <li>- Visually translating position elements</li> <li>- Turning strategic changes into applicable corporate stories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Designing messages for corporate level use</li> <li>- Designing messages for business-, segment-, or industry-specific position purposes to enhance relevance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Convince businesses to change despite having a direct mandate to enforce changes (context of decentralized organizations)</li> </ul>
(6) Educating and convincing internal stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conducting further group-wide marketing workshops</li> <li>- Verifying and fine-tuning brand position elements</li> <li>- Educating managers across group in latest marketing knowledge to secure positive impact of changes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introducing initial work-in-progress results via global management forums to spark interest among top managers across group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Balancing bottom-up process and top-down processes</li> <li>- Keeping high level of internal awareness</li> <li>- Creating brand engagement by continuous communication</li> </ul>
(7) Implementing intended position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preparing brand position documents (such as brand books, brand stories, and platform documents.</li> <li>- Arranging pilot implementation workshops with selected BUs</li> <li>- Turning intended brand positions into applicable business stories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Utilizing external events such as Investor Relations meetings or group-wide industry fairs to test internal and external reactions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Making sure businesses are able to leverage updated corporate brand position for specific BU usage</li> <li>- Customizing and managing the level of pace.</li> </ul>

## ***Business-Level Actions***

It has been argued throughout this thesis that there is a need for better insights regarding how processes of positioning unfold over time and, especially, how the position of a corporate brand and the position of its products are connected. Now that we have gained insights into the processes of brand positioning on corporate level, this sub-chapter aims to uncover the events, activities, and choices that constitute the product positioning planning phase on business level utilizing corporate brand position guidelines. Newly developed corporate brand propositions are steered towards embedding such propositions in product development processes and concrete product manifestations for entering new market segments, market regions, or simply improving and defending existing market positions.

### *The Three Stages of Business-Level Positioning Action*

I identified three stages of business-level positioning action (represented by distinct management activities and events) across the studied and embedded cases: (1) Positioning activities before product development processes start, (2) Positioning activities during product development processes, and (3) Positioning activities after product development processes. Figure 29 illustrates actions of business-level product positioning.

#### Stage 1: Positioning activities before product development processes start

*External research:* Product brand positioning projects start with market sensing and customer insight generation activities with the purpose of understanding how markets are developing and how customer needs are changing. In cases where businesses were planning to tap into new segments beyond the traditional ones, extensive research was conducted due to a higher level of uncertainty. Observing and tracking competitors is another activity used to stay up-to-date with external developments. Conducting customer surveys was a way to learn more about the brand's own strengths and weaknesses. As for positioning choices made during the research phase, respondents highlighted that the external research focus is placed on customer insight generation, rather than on competitor analyses. Depending on the project's scope, consultants were hired for conducting market research in new segment or product development.

*Translating and refining research findings:* Translating captured customer needs or market requirements into refined specifics aims to improve products and solutions and thereby increase their relevance for the targeted customers. Integrating with customer organizations and being part of their development has the aim to create win-win situations. Another activity is defining the difference compared to competition by means of analyzing points of parity (functional customer requirements) and points of difference (solutions and services that make a difference).

The challenge is to become better in utilizing market-pull instead of technology market-push strategies.

### Stage 2: Positioning activities during product development processes

*Corporate brand guideline integration:* Leveraging the corporate brand name for a new product or new segment development aims to better facilitate market or segment entry and growth. It is essential to conforming to corporate visual brand identity guidelines in order to secure consistency in product development and communication by utilizing, applying, and aligning with the corporate brand position. For instance:

The ABB brand is really important to us and crucial for me. I try to monitor that the development department really conducts accordingly. Sometimes I find something that is not really according to that and then they [technical product developers] have to redo it. (ABB, product manager)

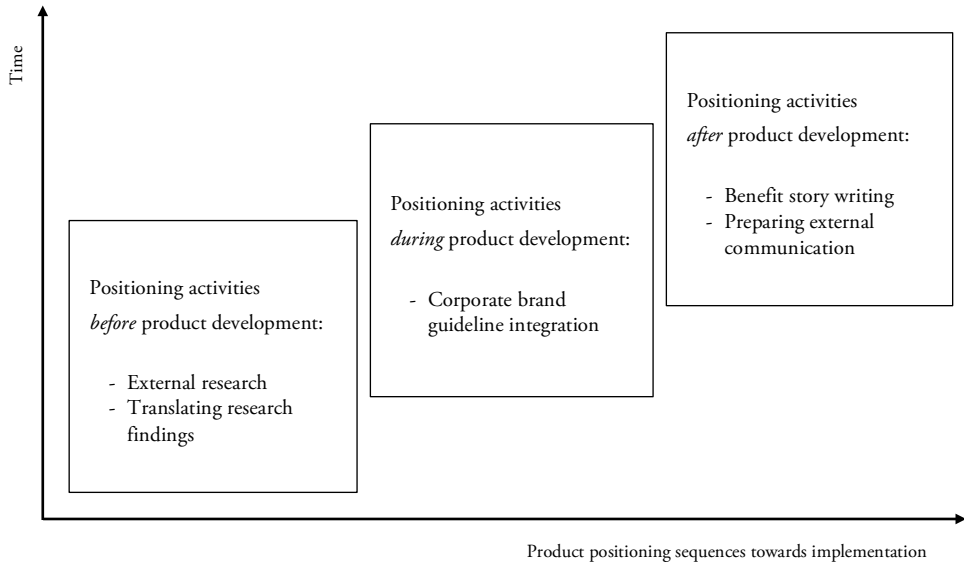
Specifying corporate brand platform elements is necessary in order to increase strengths and capabilities of specific products and solutions. During product development projects, the product's brand expression is the subject of discussion between product managers and R&D specialists, as the ABB business level case specifically has shown.

### Stage 3: Positioning activities after product development processes

*Benefit story writing:* Once product development processes are finalized, a brand positioning discussion resumes. During team meetings, product and communication managers discuss the creation of story material. Creating such solution-specific story material focuses on customer value-based messages and success stories based on satisfied customers and their interview statements, as in the case of ABB Force Measurement. This is essentially an argument-finding process for benefit-oriented communication in order to justify price premiums for the premium-positioned products discussed in this thesis. Writing segment or product position statements, thereby focusing on concrete value propositions, finalizes the formulation process on business level.

*Preparing external brand position communication:* Next, activities to brief and train product-area sales force take place, to ensure correct transmission of the intended position and value proposition.

As for challenges, respondents highlighted the difficulty in ensuring that the very core corporate brand values and position elements are actually incorporated in the products and solutions. Moreover, branding products that are not easily differentiable beyond mere function is a challenge, as is consistently aligning and delivering highest quality, avoiding the dilution of the corporate brand and product name.



**Figure 29**  
Stages of business-level product positioning

*Summary*

Positioning activities on business level reflect what economic sociologists have coined ‘justifying worth’ (Stark, 2010), ‘economics of singularities’ (Karpik, 2010) or ‘the economy of qualities’ (Callon et al., 2002). At the heart of the logic of qualifying products (evolving and changing over time) and positioning goods (at a certain point in time) are sociological devices, designed by economic agents, to distribute cognitive competencies, which steadily alter supply and demand (Callon et al., 2002, p. 194). A good’s objectification, then, implies specific ‘metrological work’ (Latour, 1986) and heavy investments in what Callon and colleagues (2002) call ‘measuring equipment’, something that is not unusual for the engineering companies studied in this thesis. The following quotation illustrates the scientific organization of stable measurement and standards (metrology) to position branded goods and services at Trelleborg Sealing Solutions Kalmar:

We were the first with everything: for example, building noise dynamometers to test, instead of driving cars. We tested in-house in a lab environment. Now all our competitors, even smaller ones besides the two main ones, are investing in testing. But we were first, that’s what people will remember. Even if others say ‘we also have some dynamometers’, it’s still very much our measurements and standards that are applied to the competitor’s [systems]. (Trelleborg Sealing Solutions Kalmar, plant manager)

Such positioning devices, paired with market- and brand-oriented positioning elements, constitute business level positioning activities over time. The case study contexts have shown that organizations have differently developed units with regard to branding and businesses that are already adjusting to a new (market) environment by applying a certain type of positioning strategy. As Weick and Quinn pointed out, the challenge then for corporate level was “to gain acceptance of continuous change throughout the organization so that these isolated innovations will travel and be seen as relevant to a wider range of purposes at hand” (1999, p. 381).

## ***Outcomes***

As emphasized earlier in this thesis, empirical positioning research has been, for the most part, ‘outcome-driven’ (Kalafatis et al., 2000). The identification of positioning as a strategic development process does not dismiss the importance of outcome; however, outcome is understood differently on the grounds of the empirical study, and is comprehended in two ways. In one way, brand position outcomes are referred to as the external changes in market position, image, and reputation once macro-episodes of corporate brand positioning have been completed, implemented, and externally communicated. Such external macro-outcomes have been referred to as brand positions that are ‘owned’, such as the ‘technology leadership’ brand association in the case of ABB.

In the second way of viewing it, brand position micro-outcomes are referred to as the internal changes being produced throughout episodes of brand change. An eventually convinced CEO or executive management team can be regarded as corporate brand positioning process outcomes. Moreover, a brand position and promise defined in words, as well as a visually supplemented brand position and promise, are tangible achievements following from the process. An enhanced internal understanding of why a cross-group aligned brand position is important is also an outcome, as it convinces non-brand knowledgeable business managers to implement the newly developed brand position concept. Finally, influencing new work practices or procedures triggered by new brand positioning guidelines is another noticeable outcome, as seen across cases.

## ***Practitioners and Practices***

Part of the research aim and question concerns gaining better insights into the practitioners’ roles and their activities in *doing* positioning work, with the intention of uncovering and understanding the actors’ practices that constitute ‘strategizing for positioning’. Proponents of this strategy-as-practice approach (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Whittington, 2007) argue for the usefulness of understanding what strategy teams



and other relevant actors actually do on the grounds of social theory. To recapitulate, the practice approach to strategy identifies three central concepts: praxis, practices, and practitioners (Whittington, 2007). *Praxis* is the actual work of strategizing (for example, meetings, consultations, writing, presenting, and communicating) that constitutes making and creating strategy. *Practices* refer to the shared routines of behavior, including traditions, norms, and procedures for thinking, acting, and using 'things' in the broadest sense. Finally, *practitioners* are the workers of strategizing, including managers, consultants, and specialized internal change agents.

In researching the work of brand positioning, events such as cross-group interviews with business-level managers, brand-change workshops with business-level brand delegates, global management conferences with group-wide top managers, brand education seminars, and pilot implementation workshops with product area managers comprise the praxis of positioning strategy in my case studies. Key practitioners, besides the corporate brand manager acting as change agent, have been identified as external brand consultants, executive managers, business-unit brand delegates, and product area managers. I will now analyze the practitioner's practice and the activities comprising the practice in more detail. Table 21 summarizes practitioners and practices.

#### *Corporate Brand Management Practitioners*

The *corporate brand manager* acting as project leader, and his brand management team, are critical in internally steering corporate brand change. Cross-case evidence indicates the importance of this actor for inspiring and guiding business-level brand delegates across the group. Further management activities included preparing reports and presentations on a continuous basis, briefing and convincing direct superiors, arranging for CEO/executive management buy-in and buying-in to business level managers, as well as thinking and planning one step ahead of superiors in order to be ready to move quickly when necessary. This required skills to manage positioning projects between executive management board, brand consultants, and business-unit delegates or regional brand responsables. Therefore, aggregated corporate brand management practices can then be conceptualized as 'reflecting', 'mediating', and 'coordinating'.

#### *External Brand Consulting Practitioners*

External brand consultants fulfill another important role by offering their clients creative branding and communication ideas and solutions. They conduct research on behalf of the corporate brand manager and suggest processual guidance and working steps to facilitate positioning work, especially in the early stages of the process. Providing clients with answers to questions of 'how' rather than questions of 'what' illustrates their role as process facilitators. Importantly, consultants draw from reference cases and best-practice examples to convince their clients of what is best for

them and how to proceed. Thus, ‘catalyzing’, ‘supporting’, and ‘guiding’ are the aggregated practices accomplished by external brand consultants.

#### *CEO and Executive Management Practitioners*

The CEO and the executive management board represent the ultimate endorsers of the corporation’s brand. The CEO is the decisive weight for an eventual success of corporate brand positioning projects throughout the process. His or her role is to call executive meetings to discuss the progress of the corporate brand positioning project. Once convinced about the project, CEOs approve proposals, request changes, and give backing to the project. In this role, the CEO may agree, partly agree, or disagree to brand position proposals that have been developed in specialized brand development project forums. Thus, aggregate executive management and CEO practices are ‘authorizing’, ‘gatekeeping’, and ‘sponsoring’ positioning work operationally run by corporate brand management.

#### *Business-Level Brand-Delegate Practitioners*

Business-level brand delegates act as input sources for the corporate-level project manager. They provide feedback for corporate level concerning the future development of the brand and regarding what intended position to choose. Their activities revolve around connecting corporate- and business-level needs during the episodic and continuous stages of positioning work. Importantly, they transmit brand change decisions to the business and product on behalf of the corporate-level project leaders. In this way, their role is to make sure that corporate and business level positions are aligned in concrete product, service, and solution manifestations. However, their activities do not solely consist of agreeing to whatever corporate-level project leaders and consultants propose; business-level brand delegates also oppose or challenge suggestions when they are not convinced by or satisfied with them. Thus, business-level brand-delegate practices consist of ‘collaborating’, ‘transferring’, and ‘resisting’.

#### *Product Area Management Practitioners*

Product area managers steer business-led positioning and repositioning projects of products and solutions that are sold in the name of the corporate brand. In this way, they attempt to make businesses live up to what the corporate brand promises in concrete product, service, and solution manifestations. By explaining and showing how to utilize corporate brand position guidelines in product development and positioning projects, the various product managers act as brand stewards, caring for the highly valued brand assets (both corporate brand and product name). Therefore, aggregate product-area manager practices are ‘testing’ and ‘executing’ positioning guidelines and ‘stewarding’ valuable brand assets operationally.

**Table 21****Corporate brand positioning practitioners and practices**

CBP practitioners	CBP practice	CBP activities comprising the practice
Corporate brand management	Reflecting	- Steering corporate-led positioning projects internally - Inspiring and guiding business-level brand delegates across group
	Mediating	- Preparing reports and presentations - Briefing and convincing direct superiors
	Coordinating	- Arranging for CEO and executive management buy-in - Thinking and planning ahead of superiors to be ready to move quickly
External brand consultants	Catalyzing	- Offering creative branding and communication ideas and solutions - Conducting research on behalf of corporate brand manager
	Supporting	- Suggesting processual guidance and working steps - Providing clients with answers to 'how' rather than 'what' questions
	Guiding	- Drawing from reference cases and best practice examples
CEO and executive management	Authorizing	- Call executive meetings to discuss project progress - Give backing to the project as internal sponsors
	Gatekeeping	- Requesting changes when not satisfied - Finding room for improvements
	Sponsoring	- Approving proposals
Business-level brand delegates	Collaborating	- Giving input and providing feedback for corporate level regarding future development of corporate brand
	Resisting	- Connecting corporate- and business-level needs - Opposing or challenging suggestions if not convinced and satisfied
	Transferring	- Transmitting brand-change decisions to business and products areas
Product area management	Testing	- Steering business-led positioning projects of products and solutions sold in the name of the corporate brand
	Executing	- Living up to what the corporate brand promises in concrete solution manifestations
	Stewarding	- Acting as brand stewards by explaining and showing how to utilize corporate brand position guidelines

## Corporate Brand Positioning Process Model

The goal of this thesis is to offer more realistic insights into how a positioning project unfolds. A revised process model (Figure 30) aims at offering precisely this insight by highlighting the activities, events, and practices that occur during periods of 'strategizing for positioning' on the grounds of cross-case empirical evidence. By doing so, the initial research model is filled with meaning beyond its role of guiding the empirical case descriptions.

While the stage models introduced earlier (Figures 28 and 29) provided a useful visual tool for cross-case descriptions of the position development activities and challenges in a series of stages, it did not sufficiently capture the fact that the strategic positioning activities took place at different firm levels (Burgelman, 1983), or even outside the organization. The corporate brand positioning process model presented

here connects different organizational levels, and depicts positioning activities as they happen simultaneously or sequentially. Arrows indicate how such activities influence the corporate brand positioning process. Besides the two levels on which the research model has focused; that is, corporate and business levels, empirical evidence of corporate brand positioning processes has shown the importance of an 'external actor level' connected to corporate and business levels, as well as an 'interaction level' between corporate and business levels during the planning process.

As for the external actor level connected to corporate level, one example is external consultants facilitating the position planning and finding-process, and being called upon when input is needed. An external actor level connected to business level becomes important, during the process, when the same consultant or other, more specialized consultants, are hired to facilitate the concrete business level implementation process of the newly defined corporate brand positioning strategy (see practices of the brand consultant practitioner group).

The interaction level between corporate level and business levels is significantly important for the whole process. Strategic events such as cross-group interviews with executive managers, brand change workshops, global management conferences, brand education, and pilot implementation works are important sources for brand positioning development progress and manifestation. During these one- or two-day events outside the normal work routines of corporate and business level managers, the necessary space for strategic rethinking is provided.

As for the corporate level process patterns, they follow, in principle, the corporate brand positioning action stages introduced earlier. Besides providing input to the positioning development process from the beginning, the role of the business level becomes even more central once developed position strategies have to be implemented in concrete product and solutions manifestations.

The process model of corporate brand positioning offers the more realistic insights promised at the outset. This is due to three key factors: first, it takes into account multiple levels over time (corporate, business, corporate/business interaction, and external); second, it illuminates key organizational events that constitute episodic positioning practice; and finally, it incorporates the positioning practices of differently positioned practitioners in the organization.



## Conceptual Interpretation of Cross-Case Patterns

Empirically observed temporal patterns have a similar status to empirically observed correlations. Without explanation, they are incomplete. The pattern might need some underlying logic that enables the reader to understand why progression through phases would occur precisely in this way. This is where mechanisms complement the process patterns initially found and presented above. The aim of this chapter is to present underlying mechanisms, or combinations of mechanisms, that make process sequences more understandable (Easton, 2010; Langley, 2011). Understanding corporate brand positioning and repositioning as episodic change processes over time makes it obvious to explain such processes on the basis of organizational change theories. While the literature on change is enormous, some meta-theories of change are promising in helping to explain why positioning and repositioning episodes evolve the way they do. Based on an exhaustive review of research on development and change in a variety of disciplines (such as sociology, biology, or physics), Van de Ven and Poole (1995) identified a set of four basic generative mechanisms that cover the range of theoretical motors used to explain change (see Chapter 2). The list of four motors offers possible templates for generating process understandings about change (Langley, 2011). Other useful meta-theoretical models are inspired by social-cognition (such as sensemaking and sense-giving) or culture (Kezar, 2001; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Van de Ven and Poole (1995) suggested the use of a combination of several change motors or categories, as each perspective is able to shed light on different aspects of organizational life, thereby combining insights of various change theories. The following section is an attempt to explain some aspects of the findings of the thesis by means of meta-theoretical change theories such as evolution, life cycle, teleology, dialectic, social-cognition, and culture. As the next section explains the first-order findings presented earlier, the upcoming findings can be called second-order findings (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

### *Positioning as Evolution and Revolution*

Positioning's revolutionary change character was most clearly visible in ABB's second episode, when the corporation and its brand suffered a severe crisis. Revolutionary change was driven externally (multiple crisis aspects) and implied the discontinuation of previous corporate strategy and positioning. This generated novel second-order change, where a previous 'belief system' is replaced by a new one (Weick & Quinn, 1999):

[The Dormann Letters were] very much part of the strategic conversation, which also had a branding aspect to it because it was very much about changing culture, changing behavior, and making people understand what the company stood for. [...] Almost like teachers, we came back to the same things over and over again so that people understand that this was a question of survival. (ABB, head of corporate communications)

Most positioning cases over time, however, followed an evolutionary event sequence of variation, selection, retention, and variation again (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Changes in intended position did not depart too much from the existing framework of what the corporate brands stand for, historically. Acquiring certain traits through learning and imitation (such as becoming more brand-oriented or market-oriented) produced variations of a position over time. Trelleborg's most recent episode of positioning illustrates this pattern:

There was a need to clarify what Trelleborg was today and where to move for the future. Building a platform of strategic positioning, clarifying the promises, different target groups, and below working with other elements such as target group messaging and visual identity to strengthen that message. That's basically why and how it started as an evolutionary journey. (Trelleborg, head of corporate communications)

The evolutionary character of the brand and its position become even clearer on businesses levels, as product evolution and position development constantly emerge over time:

We don't discard development because it doesn't meet the brand itself and what it stands for. I would say we have more or less been involved in developing *Stressometer* and the other products for so long; it's a constant evolution. (ABB Force Measurement, business director)

At times, the technological innovations and their positioning and communication are packaged as radical change but still develop in an evolutionary manner, as the most recent Invercote technology-driven positioning process at Iggesund Paperboard has shown:

We are building on what we have and we are developing something, where the platform will still be there. But it will be quite a radical change. (Iggesund Paperboard, market communications director)

To conclude, positioning's evolutionary character usually follows the mechanism of variation, selection, retention, and back to variation, responding to competitive selection and resource scarcity (such as adapting to changes in the environment to keep a competitive edge). While more rare episodes of revolutionary change create second-order change (creating a new 'corporate brand belief system'), more frequent episodes of evolutionary change usually produce moderate changes in current 'corporate brand belief systems', as they build upon history, heritage, and the brand's track record (first-order change).

## ***Positioning as Institutionalized Life Cycles***

In the context of product brand management, the life cycle metaphor (event sequence of start-up, grow, harvest, terminate, and start-up again) has been influential for quite some time. During the selection, introduction, elaboration, and fortification of the brand concept, a certain brand management framework would, for example, prescribe activities and choices based on functional, symbolic, or experiential brand meanings (Park et al., 1989). Considering the nature of the corporate brand as being inevitably tied to the existence of the organization it represents, it might appear counter-intuitive to introduce the notion of life cycle. How can such a construct (corporate brand) start, grow, be harvested and then terminated, to finally start again? Reflecting upon the activities and choices (stages) that represent corporate brand positioning in recurring episodes over time makes the life cycle mechanism appear more reasonable. It is not the corporate brand as such that inherits a life cycle mechanism; in fact, it is an 'institutionalized positioning program' (activities, choices, events, etc.) that prescribes specific contents of the activity stages, as cases have shown. Take Trelleborg's most recent episode as an example:

It was a process involving all senior management. It's done 'by the book' in the sense that we looked at external stakeholders and how they interpret Trelleborg as a brand; image and so forth. The same thing we did internally; not only how we are perceived but also how we would like to be perceived. We involved lots of people in different functions, geographies, and businesses and through different forums. (Trelleborg, head of corporate communications)

Positioning *activities* resemble a prescribed life cycle over time, as they typically follow the logic of initiation (start-up), development, implementation, and internal/external communication (grow). In a best-case scenario, they further cater for positive results and outcomes for the brand (harvest) before internal, external, or business ownership drivers require changes in positioning strategy again (start-up). However, in corporate brand positioning cases (and also in many product brand positioning cases), 'start-up' never occurs from scratch, as deeply rooted values, heritage, and track record (the organization's and corporate brand's necessary relation), to some extent, pre-determine how the brand and its position will develop (as explained in the evolutionary change motor section). Due to the life cycle's regulated and institutionalized program (Weick & Quinn, 1999), a second-order change is less likely to occur.

## ***Positioning as Purposeful Enactment***

The teleological change mechanism (the character attributed to processes being directed towards an end or shaped by a purpose) helps explain why change agents are important for initiating (and succeeding in) corporate brand positioning episodes over



time. Development in the teleological change understanding is something that moves the organization towards a final state through purposeful cooperation and enactment (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). In the context of this thesis, the final state refers to an altered corporate brand position that should ultimately contribute to the firm's competitive advantage. Despite the teleological change motor's focus on the purposiveness of the actors and goals, environmental or resource limitations on change also need to be acknowledged. While a teleological mechanism can list a set of possible paths for change (as the positioning process model, Figure 30, illustrates), it cannot specify exactly what trajectory an organizational entity will follow or prescribe a certain path. The contextual factors impacting the positioning (for example, slowing down the change process) should not be underestimated, as the following quotation illustrates:

If we have had a management team with more maturity in the branding field and if I have had a bigger mandate, that would not be the model we would choose. But now that's the way the world looks, so we need to make the best out of the situation. [...] We are working extremely hard with the internal anchoring [...] It is a process that needs to take place in steps and requires a lot of political massaging and tweaking. (Trelleborg, global brand director)

To conclude, positioning's teleological character usually follows the mechanism of recurring, discontinuous episodes of goal setting, implementation, and adaption of a means to reach an intended 'end state'. However, institutional and other types of constraints affect the teleological positioning process. The mode of change (sequence of change events) is essentially constructed by individual actors and emerges as the process unfolds (Weick & Quinn, 1999). In case institutional constraints can be overcome, the teleological positioning mechanism is capable of creating second-order change.

### ***Positioning as Balancing Power Between Opposing Forces***

A dialectical change mechanism (based on the philosophical method of examining and discussing opposing ideas in order to find 'truth') helps to explain resistance to change and conflict between corporate- and business-level brand positioning over time. At times, a 'corporate-level positioning thesis' is faced with a 'business-level positioning anti-thesis', as several empirical examples have shown. Such mechanisms of pluralism, confrontation, and conflict (Weick & Quinn, 1999; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995) are constitutive of ongoing brand position change processes. For example, corporate level leaders faced potential conflict when implementing a 'one company, one brand' strategy and cultural changes, as in the case of ABB:

Some people looked back like 'Oh, it was better when we were Asea in Sweden, what the hell, why did we make that merger?' You had people who felt like that sometimes. Then it was important to rally around ABB. (ABB, former CEO)

Such tensions and conflicts resulting from a corporate-level thesis and business-level anti-thesis may also result in changes to the overall strategy:

We were a one-brand company before. This changed during the last couple of years. Now we are taking more care of the respective cultures and it's not only about using the ABB logotype. Here, the integration strategy is to say 'A Company within ABB'. This means to apply some kind of daughter brand strategy in the overall ABB mother brand strategy. (ABB, head of corporate communications, Sweden)

Incidents of resistance to change on business level are also prime examples of contradictory values that occasionally compete with each other for brand domination and control. ABB Force Measurement and Trelleborg Sealing Solutions Kalmar, for example, refused to remove their heritage brand after forced corporate level changes:

We were supposed to come up with plans for [new] names that should be on the different products but I refused. [...] The head office in Zurich wanted us to remove the *Stressometer* name. But I said that this was not a good idea because 'that's what we are living on!' (ABB Force Measurement, communications manager)

When we lost the *Rubore* name in our communication, we applied for the *Rubore* brand name as a daughter brand. I asked myself 'how to position us' and 'how to deal with this'. [...] I started a small campaign to get the *Rubore* brand accepted. That was not easy. We have heard it throughout the years not to use the name, so we tried to sell it in to Trelleborg. [...] It went all the way up to Peter Nilsson [CEO] and finally got accepted. (Trelleborg Sealing Solutions Kalmar, sales & marketing manager)

Conflicts also emerged due to time delays in the positioning decision-making process, as discussed earlier. However, this balancing process of opposing opinions and agendas between the different positioning practitioners can be constitutive of the resulting synthesis of change and/or continuity to the brand's intended position.

### ***Positioning as Managing Language and Dialogue***

Episodes of position change have shown that they develop as a product of sensemaking and sense-giving processes that alternate over time (see this chapter on 'location and timing'). As a process of organizing, the brand change leader's initial *sensemaking* comprised the "ongoing retrospective development of plausible images" that rationalized their abstract brand change creation. *Sense-giving* activities of distributing the intended changes to corporate- as well as business-level stakeholders in the course of the project (comprehended explicitly in words), served as the "springboard into action" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409) of what was about to follow in impending positioning development stages. The role of each episode's change agents became one of managing language, dialogue, and identity (Weick & Quinn, 1999) concerning the freezing and rebalancing of positioning strategy over time. Position

change episodes are intricately linked to learning processes throughout stages, responding to challenges such as those of political or institutional nature. Recall these examples from ABB and Trelleborg:

Bringing everyone to a similar level of knowledge involved quite a lot of travelling, many presentations, discussions, and workshops. It took quite some time to create the awareness and develop the understanding internally. [...] After that and with the help of the senior management, it was much easier. (ABB, head of global branding)

I had hundreds of presentations, workshops, meetings over the past two-and-a-half years for this project on corporate group level only and in key forums like OGM, brand board, and marketing council, multiple workshops with individual entities, strategic marketing training, etc. If there is one thing that is absolutely key, it is presenting, discussing, aligning [...]. (Trelleborg, global brand director)

In cultural change, explanations, language interventions, and dialogue (as a response to alterations in the human environment) also become an important means for agents to create change (Johansson & Heide, 2008; Kotter, 1995; Weick & Quinn, 1999). This was once again visible in ABB's second episode of positioning, in which revolutionary change involved a new type of organization-wide strategic conversation and triggered a cultural change that essentially involved alterations of values and beliefs (Schein, 2010). This thesis has shown that on business level positioning, change and cultural change that usually develops slowly over time go together:

You follow your road like a traveler, but you keep some rules while you travel, you move forward, but change your position, but still keep some principles. I am convinced they are good, but I critically analyze them. If they are good, I keep them. (ABB Force Measurement, technology manager)

To conclude, making lasting cultural changes requires (brand) change leaders to have a talent for 'speaking differently', rather than for 'arguing well' (Weick & Quinn, 1999), as changes to the predominant strategic conversation, for example, revolve around 'power and productivity' (ABB), 'climbing the value chain' (Trelleborg), or 'verbalizing and emotionalizing' a brand family (Iggesund Paperboard).

### *A Composite Understanding of Corporate Brand Positioning*

It has become clearer that brand position change processes actually combine several of the 'ideal type change motor theories' as time passes. More specifically, they form a composite explanation shedding light on different aspects of corporate brand positioning's organizational processes. On organizational level, we have seen the evolutionary (recurring positioning episodes slowly changing the organization and its brand), life cycle (following an institutionalized procedure, as exemplified in the seven stages of positioning), and cultural character (dispensing a distinct language and values) of change. The group and individual levels showed evidence for teleology

(initiatives and creativity of individual change leaders to influence the process), dialectics (conflict related to autonomy and control within and across organizational levels), and sensemaking (managing language and dialogue for freezing and rebalancing positioning strategy) in episodes of position change over time. Hence, the degree of complementarity among mechanisms (Van den Ven & Poole, 1995) can be assessed as reinforcing, rather than contradicting, one another. Moreover, the studied positioning cases provide evidence for both first-order change characteristics (prescribed change, as in life cycle and evolution) and second-order change (constructed and emergent change, as in dialectics and teleology). This implies that positioning develops and interplays between managerial agency (teleological and dialectical elements) and structural, institutional, or environmental constraints (evolutionary and life cycle elements) over time.

# Chapter 9 | Discussion

Having analyzed and presented my findings within and across cases in the previous chapters, this chapter further highlights key findings and discusses them in the light of previous studies on brand positioning, corporate branding, and strategic change. The discussion follows the structure of the cross-case analysis chapter and adds some theoretical perspectives (such as market and brand orientation) for discussing the findings.

## Corporate Brand Positioning Location and Timing

Findings suggest that position change processes take place in an iterative fashion on both corporate and business levels over time. In fact, corporate brand positioning is a recurring process that alternates, over time, between these two levels (see Figure 27). Brand positioning processes on corporate level initially start with change leaders such as the CEO or corporate brand director developing a sense of the organization's internal and external environment and defining a modified conception of it. Once this need for change is developed, change leaders create an abstract vision of the intended change in corporate brand position and distribute it to corporate- and business-level stakeholders in the course of the project. Business unit delegates (such as business directors or marketing managers) act as input and feedback sources for corporate level regarding the future development of the brand, and thereby developing a sense of the intended changes in their view during the interaction process. Towards implementation, position change processes steered by corporate level trigger position change processes on business level. In resonance, product-level managers make sense of the required changes (looking for reasons that will enable them to resume an interrupted activity) before integrating and embedding them in ongoing product development processes of the respective business unit or product area. The findings are generally in accordance with previous research on strategic change initiation, where processes of sensemaking and sense-giving alternate in the course of the change project (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

As for the time aspect of corporate brand positioning, processes need to be seen as episodic in nature. Corporate brand positioning or repositioning projects start with an understanding of a need to change, then enter stages of positioning action, and

end by dissolving in implementation activities and continuous branding activities on corporate and business levels, once a common ground and guidelines have been agreed upon. However, the research reported in this thesis also highlights the difficulty of setting a clear beginning and end to such *positioning macro-episodes*. Like strategic change processes in general, they are contextually located, continuous processes with no clear beginning or end (Pettigrew, 1985, Weick & Quinn, 1999).

Having clarified that corporate brand positioning projects are macro-episodes, corporate brand positioning events such as brand change workshops, global management conferences, marketing education workshops, and implementation workshops need to be seen as micro-episodes occurring during the change process. Organizations were able to suspend their day-to-day routine structures of communication and hierarchy during such *positioning micro-episodes*; this is how organizations can create the opportunity for reflective strategic practice (Hendry & Seidl, 2003). Trelleborg's latest repositioning project has shown, for example, that strategic micro-episodes such as the initial brand change workshop are not only important for changing strategies, but also for confirming and reinforcing them during additional brand change workshops in the course of the project. Such reoccurring strategic episodes of corporate- and business-level interaction were also a way of engaging multiple business units in activities for shaping the intended corporate brand position; this was a way of reducing potential barriers for implementing the new positioning strategy across the group.

## Corporate Brand Positioning Drivers

The findings on why position change occurs showed three broad patterns: changes in *business ownership*, different *internal* conditions, and changes in the *external* environment. As discussed in the analysis chapter, corporate- and business-level drivers of positioning episodes were not found to be exclusively business ownership-, internal-, or external-related, but also included several of these elements that in most cases coincide with driving positioning and repositioning macro-episodes. Furthermore, I categorized drivers according to their *reactive* or *proactive*, *urgent* or *non-urgent* change characteristics (Kezar, 2001; Miller et al., 2014).

Proactive change can be described as taking place, for example, before a crisis situation and through believing in the need for brand position change as well as enhancement to meet future competitive demands. In proactive change processes, opportunities have been identified to enhance the brand and its position. This occurs when internal mechanisms drive positioning episodes; for instance, a new corporate structure, strategy, or vision, and the highly connected driver of newly hired managers coming into the organization and acting as change agents. The aspect of personnel changes is worth discussing, as the positioning and repositioning cases in this thesis

have shown that, in many instances, corporate brand position change initiatives followed the arrival of a new CEO or other leadership figure. The ABB and Trelleborg positioning cases have shown that new CEOs, new corporate communications staff, or new corporate brand managers who are recruited from outside the organization, and in most cases have had experiences in a consumer branding context, are drivers of change. Additional proactive elements in driving position change were: taking actions to change an 'outdated image' of the corporate brand, 'climbing the value chain' by talking about solutions and customer benefits instead of mere function, and simply professionalizing, improving, updating, and filling gaps from previous efforts in an evolutionary rather than revolutionary way. Creating change proactively and without a severe business or corporate crisis requires the understanding of internal brand change agents to not expect 'too much too soon' (Pettigrew, 1985). Deeply rooted decentralization structures and entrepreneurially run businesses in ABB and Trelleborg exemplified the need to progress slowly and with incremental changes (not radical), to the corporate brand and its position. Therefore, proactively driving corporate brand positioning and repositioning projects requires significant internal buy-in and convincing activities to explain why changes to the corporate brand position will be helpful in the long run. From this perspective, proactive changes should be coupled with non-urgent timeframes, which means granting the necessary time for position reformulation and implementation.

Reactive change elements can be described as happening after a crisis and in response to internal or external pressures for change; that is, reactive cases have external factors that negatively affect the brand, thereby activating positioning or repositioning efforts. The analysis has shown that positioning episodes are reactive when business ownership drivers such as mergers, acquisitions, or divestments are in place. In this case, reactivity might also be interrelated with urgency after a merger, when a new brand name and its intended position need to be found rather quickly, as the first ABB positioning episode has illustrated. Engaging reactively in positioning and repositioning projects also occurs when external drivers are in place; for instance, when competitors begin initiatives to brand and reposition, or when such crisis situations lead to a decrease in the value of the organization in the eyes of stakeholders. ABB's second positioning episode has illustrated that "real change requires crisis conditions" (Pettigrew, 1987, p. 665). Other reactive, external drivers of corporate brand positioning and repositioning are: globalization and emerging market developments, growing importance of digital media channels, a 'global race for talents', an increase of professionalism in external stakeholders, and constantly improving financial margins. Also from this external driver perspective, reactive changes should, if possible, be coupled with non-urgent timeframes, which means granting the necessary time for position reformulation and implementation to make lasting and useful changes.

Positioning drivers' proactive and reactive nature also needs to be discussed vis-à-vis corporate strategy and brand strategy. Most cases have shown that the brand follows

corporate strategy changes (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). However, the closer the corporate brand strategy core is connected to the corporate strategy core (such as in ABB episode two and Trelleborg episode one), the more equally both elements develop, reinforcing each other over time. Evolutionarily, brand position development alternates between driving, and being driven by, corporate strategy. Over time, the role of the corporate brand goes beyond the visible corporate strategy implementation (Esch, 2010), becoming the strategic hub that is likely to guide corporate position *and* brand position decisions.

## Corporate Brand Positioning Action

### *Activities*

It has been argued that “all [brand positioning] models are based on the same assumptions and work along the same lines. They define a core target consumer and then identify an insight about that particular group of consumers, which the brand then addresses with its single-minded proposition, supported by one or more reasons to believe” (Jowitt & Lury, 2012, p. 97). The empirical case evidence in this thesis has shown that such normative step-by-step product-positioning models (see, for example, Figure 5, de Pelsmacker et al., 2007) are not fully realistic, and are, therefore, less useful in the context of positioning corporate brands of complex organizations. This is because problems arise, for example, from the difficulty in assessing who can be regarded as a competitor in a corporate brand environment and on what kind of customer and other stakeholder perceptions should one base corporate brand positioning decisions. This thesis has provided in-depth insights into how corporate brand positioning processes occur over time and what concrete projects of ‘strategizing for positioning’ look like in multi-business firms. The patterns of activities show similarities to the cycles of corporate brand building (Schultz & Hatch, 2003) that have been found in a consumer corporate brand (that is, LEGO) context. Especially during episodes when corporate brand strategy formation and positioning coincide (ABB episode two, Trelleborg episode one), activity cycles included elements such as stating ‘who you are’ and ‘who you want to be’, organizing behind your identity, involving relevant stakeholders, integrating all expressions of your brand, and monitoring results through performance measurements (Schultz, 2005; Schultz & Hatch, 2003). However, in repositioning episodes the cases have shown that core identity and value aspects of the corporate brand are not renegotiated over and over again. Brand identity aspects are only slightly updated, or additional identity aspects are added to the core ones. This highlights the general understanding of the role of positioning to “not reveal all the brand’s richness of meaning nor reflect all of its potential”, while “brand identity provides the framework



for overall brand coherence” (Kapferer, 2012, p. 154). It also illustrates how brand identity represents relatively fixed and stable meanings compared to social and organizational identities’ reflexive, dynamic, and multifaceted nature (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2006). Once core identity elements such as brand values and brand promise have been developed, they are likely to function as a “beacon to guide the internal and external brand building processes” (Urde, 2013, p. 758).

Brand positioning episodes are essentially characterized by buying-in, organizing, analyzing, imagining, involving, educating, integrating, and implementing activities, as exemplified by the seven stages of corporate brand positioning in multi-business firms (Figure 28). The importance of educating organizational members regarding the need to change, continuously communicating the brand’s changed intended position, and documenting the brand change for internal use and support, was found to be vital and corroborates previous research (Wallström et al., 2008; Yakimova & Beverland, 2005). This point also raises attention to the need of ensuring stakeholder buy-in throughout the process of positioning and repositioning, *not* starting with stakeholder buy-in at the end of the chain, after brand revision and strategy implementation have been performed (see Figure 7, Miller et al., 2014). Continuous buy-in attempts occur on several organizational levels, as exemplified by CEO ‘upstream’ buy-in, corporate-level functions ‘sidestream’ buy-in, and business-level ‘downstream’ buy-in.

## ***Choices***

In addition to choosing brand position content, case evidence has shown that process choices are also important. As for corporate brand positioning *content choices*, it is necessary to find balanced ways of aiming for differentiation without losing integration across businesses. This challenge has been illustrated as one of the major paradoxes of corporate brand management (Gyrd-Jones, Merrilees, & Miller, 2013). In other words, multi-business firms engaging in corporate brand positioning activities, such as ABB and Trelleborg, need to be “ambidextrous” (that is, able to use the right and left hands equally well) in order to achieve a high-level, differentiated corporate brand position and at the same ensure adaptability and integration, with customized value propositions for specific businesses, segments, products, and solutions. In this way a differentiated, competitive market position can be achieved across organizational levels, while the second objective – to achieve organizational coherence internally – can be achieved at the same time. Positioning corporate brands certainly does not require project responsables to choose between positions that are credible *or* aspirational, functional *or* emotional (Aaker, 2008a; Esch, 2005); in fact, the choice needs to incorporate elements of credibility *and* aspiration, functionality *and* emotionality (see, for example, ABB’s *Power and Productivity for a Better World*) for a high-level corporate brand position that is able to support more specified

business-level value propositions as well as other stakeholder target groups such as future employees or the financial community. This balancing act requires organizations to add attributes, benefits, or attitudes to the products and solutions sold in the name of the corporate brand, while the corporate brand specifies the high-level, overall value (Kapferer, 2012). Value propositions on corporate and business levels then need to be actively communicated within the framework of the overall positioning strategy. Communicating value propositions on corporate level, I found, is mostly related to positioning approaches highlighting corporate ability and mentality, as well as target group benefits and values. More clearly refined business-level value propositions and positioning approaches specify concrete customer benefits and values with prototypical claims and solution features.

As for corporate brand positioning *process choices*, the findings illustrate aspects that have not received enough attention in previous brand positioning or corporate branding research. Choosing to involve superiors only at high-level, letting them act as transmitters between the executive management board and operational project leaders illustrates the political dimension of engaging in positioning projects in multi-business firms. Additionally, the choice of 'outsourcing' parts of the positioning work to external consultants and the rationale behind such choices have not been sufficiently discussed and have even been taken for granted in brand management research. Concerning the brand analysis stage, case companies chose to select only global competitors to secure feasibility for comparisons on corporate level. Typically, a choice needs to be made regarding the ratio of externally and internally oriented research; there is a tendency to emphasize internal aspects to ensure group-wide support, but there also exists the difficulty of combining customer insights from multiple different businesses. Considering the role of countless PowerPoint slides and presentations as a means of legitimizing knowledge (Kaplan, 2011), it is only to a marginal degree that brand positioning strategy is about making choices based on such brand audits (internal and external analyses). Brand positioning strategizing could be mainly thought of as making and presenting PowerPoint documents to convince several internal stakeholders in the course of the project. The qualities of such technologies allow to perform planned actions and, importantly, to "create a space where new strategies and organizational changes can be negotiated" (Kaplan, 2011, p. 344). Brand positioning processes also highlight the important sensemaking mechanism of commensuration to simplify information and decontextualize knowledge, exemplified in early stages of positioning work. Reducing, simplifying, and integrating information (commensuration) was a means for organizing positioning processes. By "making irrelevant vast amounts of information, and by imposing on what remains the same form" (Espeland & Sauder, 2007, p. 17) commensuration simplified positioning knowledge. As a consequence, brand analysis information seemed more robust and definitive than it would have if presented in more complicated forms (for example, ABB's decision to focus the brand analysis on global competitors and not on local ones in order to simplify the process).

Appointing brand delegates across business units (in Trelleborg) or regions (in ABB) in order to transfer and diffuse brand position changes to respective business units and regions is another choice that was made in the course of a corporate brand positioning or repositioning projects. To ensure a match of content between high-level positioning elements and business-level positioning elements, in order to enhance relevance, messages need to be designed for corporate level as well as for business, segment, or industry-specific brand position purposes and other stakeholders. As observed in the case studies, reaching this agreement needed episodic and ongoing communication and negotiation efforts. Strategic episodes, such as Trelleborg's global management forums, were important for introducing initial work-in-progress results to spark interest among top managers across the organization. The choice of utilizing external events such as Investor Relations meetings or group-wide industry fairs to test both internal and external reactions to the newly developed or updated position aims to ensure continued internal support and buy-in. Finally, relating to the interest among organizational change theorists to understand which elements are to be altered first and why, in processes of strategic change (Pettigrew et al., 2001), case evidence in Trelleborg has shown that business areas and units that had a stronger need to improve branding capabilities and were eager to implement suggested changes were initially focused upon. This means that these units were prioritized over other units for piloting and collaborative position implementation.

## *Challenges*

Having to face numerous challenges in corporate brand positioning and repositioning endeavors, project leaders engaged in several activities to overcome major barriers to the process, such as developing brand change understanding very early in the process, engaging in internal branding activities exemplified by brand change workshops, ensuring continuity of core brand attributes despite changes of other elements, coordinating internal stakeholders on corporate and business levels, and being confronted with multiple sub-identities in a 'one company, one voice' strategy. These challenges are discussed in previous research concerning challenges in corporate rebranding (Gotsi & Andriopoulos, 2007; Miller et al., 2014). Moreover, the general challenge of organizations that engage in corporate branding (that is, to find a balance between tensions), has been found to be highly relevant for corporate brand positioning and repositioning exercises. For example, the multi-business firms studied in this thesis needed to balance between brand position centralization decisions, risking to being perceived as the 'brand police' and triggering resistance, and decentralization elements, risking to create 'brand turfs' that trigger brand fragmentation (Schultz & Hatch, 2003). Alternating between 'pull' and 'push' management approaches helped to balance the process in mutually shaping the positioning process from corporate to business level and vice versa. Due to the complex and time-consuming nature of corporate brand positioning projects, there is

a need for momentum-keeping activities (such as workshops, meetings, etc.) as well as a risk of losing momentum due to project delays caused by many rounds of discussions, approval-waiting loops, and compromises that need to be made to satisfy most stakeholders involved in the process.

## Corporate Brand Positioning Outcomes

As highlighted in the analysis chapter, outcomes are understood in two ways. On the one hand, brand positioning outcomes are referred to as the external changes in market position, image, and reputation once macro-episodes of corporate brand positioning have been completed, internally implemented, and externally communicated. Such external macro outcomes have been referred to as brand positions that are 'owned', such as the 'technology leadership' brand association in the case of ABB. To a large extent, this understanding mirrors the traditional literature and research attempts on brand positioning with the focus on outcomes in terms of brand associations *after* a brand positioning strategy has been developed, implemented, and externally portrayed to customers or consumers (Keller, 1993; Park et al., 1986; Ries & Trout, 2001).

On the other hand, brand positioning outcomes also emerged *during* the development process, and were shaped by the interests and commitments of individuals and groups, the forces of bureaucratic momentum, or the influence of the structural context around decisions that were taken (Pettigrew, 1987, p. 658). Consider, for example, the role of change agents and their institutionalized positioning programme (life cycle mechanism). Change agents coming into the organization first tackle the process as learned from previous projects (mostly in a consumer branding context), following a deliberate strategizing pattern (Mintzberg, 1978). After realizing that things work differently in their new context (industrial multi-business firms), the positioning process resembles more like an emergent process for new and unexpected learning and reevaluation (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Outcomes in this context are not understood as changes in external position, image, or reputation, but rather as micro outcomes being produced in the course of the corporate brand positioning development projects occurring across multiple levels. Such emergent corporate brand positioning process outcomes are, for example, an eventually convinced CEO and executive management team, as ABB's and Trelleborg's most recent repositioning projects have shown. Moreover, a linguistically defined brand position, in form of documents and guidelines, as well as visually supplemented brand position elements, are tangible achievements following from the process. The importance of written documents as strategic manifestations, developed and shaped through communicative interactions in brand board meetings, marketing council committees, or more informal

interactions, adds to the outcome dimension. This finding adds to previous research on the importance of documents in strategic planning processes (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011). Another outcome is an enhanced internal understanding by business level-managers regarding why a cross-group aligned brand position is important. Events such as external pilot implementation at industry fairs, or investor relation meetings to test the newly developed brand positioning strategy, are also outcomes. Key respondents in ABB and Trelleborg referred to such events as ‘game changers’ for further supporting brand position implementation.

## Corporate Brand Positioning Practitioners and Practices

This section examined what practitioners of corporate brand positioning do during processes of strategic brand change. It gives insights into the collective positioning actions across and beyond organizational levels in the three multi-business firms studied. While the findings acknowledge the importance of the corporate brand manager and CEO roles, they also underline the importance of actors other than top managers from corporate-level, embedded in brand strategizing processes. Corporate brand positioning activities and events concern different levels within the firm, and require external support.

The findings of this thesis support the understanding of the fundamental role of the *CEO* as the ultimate endorser and de facto responsible for the corporate brand and corporate brand-related decisions such as positioning and repositioning. The CEO has the privilege to approve or not approve brand position project proposals, therefore being the decisive weight for an eventual success of a corporate brand positioning project. Thus, the identified executive management and CEO practices are *authorizing*, *gatekeeping*, and *sponsoring* of positioning work operationally run by corporate brand management. Beyond this expected and formal role of a CEO; that is, to have the ultimate decision and being the ultimate guardian of the corporate brand’s reputation (Greyser, 2009), the role’s responsibilities include creating an environment where differently situated people in the organization trust each other, rely on each other, and respect different traditions and cultures. This is a challenge as, for example, ABB’s founding CEO Percy Barnevik revealed, that is, positioning a newly created corporate brand, based on many existing company histories and traditions, included to overcome cultural barriers after the merger.

The practices of *corporate brand management* were less about masterminding, notifying, and calibrating (Järventie-Thesleff et al., 2011) and more about *reflecting*, *mediating*, and *coordinating*. This is because brand change agents recognized the emerging nature of the corporate brand as well as the strategically valuable knowledge business unit delegates had about the content and activities needed to deliver the new brand promise and position, enabling the successful completion of the project

through multiple stages. Change leaders needed to find a balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches, as overemphasizing either option might lead to negative outcomes; this supports one of the general recommendations for brand management in industrial markets (Webster & Keller, 2004, p. 400). However, there was more to be achieved, as the role of the corporate brand manager in projects to position and reposition corporate brands is to balance positioning project content and process between executive management board, superiors, brand consultants, and business unit delegates or global brand responsables. In order to continuously arrange for executive management and business-level buy-in, operational project leaders needed to anticipate and plan ahead of their superiors, thus being able to move quickly and efficient. In essence, the findings have shown that corporate brand positioning projects are successful when business-level managers feel they are being heard and see the benefits resulting from the changes for their particular business. Corporate brand managers then need to make sure that brand position strategy formulation and guidelines are not only useful for some, but for most, if not all, of the numerous businesses residing under and selling in the name of the corporate brand. Moreover, case evidence has shown that the level or intensity of informing, communicating, and guiding business-level entities highly depends on the 'brand maturity' of the numerous business units, product areas, or regions that can vary greatly. The Trelleborg context has shown that some business units acted as role models and did not need to change significantly, while others needed more assistance in implementing change. Adjusting and applying the planned changes with selected businesses that are either of strategic importance or need more implementation help than more brand-mature units was important in the case of lack of knowledge and resources.

Studies in brand positioning or corporate branding typically do not go further than focusing on the contributions of the CEO, the executive management team, or senior brand managers and their 'leadership' in regards to influencing brand strategy formation and the management of the brand (see, for example, Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Stuart, 2013; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006). However, employees from different organizational divisions, external partners, or customers, are likely to be embedded in brand strategy formation processes and to contribute to brand manifestation through social interaction (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2011). The findings in this thesis underline the importance of other actors besides top managers from corporate level. Nonetheless, they also especially acknowledge the importance of the operational corporate brand change leader in mediating positioning project content between executive management board, superiors, brand consultants, and business unit delegates or regional brand responsables. Yet, this thesis shows that the brand manager is not the sole decision-maker for an intended corporate brand position. This finding differs from previous understandings, in which the brand manager is assumed to make choices for an intended brand position (Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2012, p. 10). The position finding process is, in fact, highly influenced

by other internal (that is, CEO, executive management, business unit delegates) and external (that is, external consultants) actors and their activities.

Some roles in corporate brand positioning projects, such as *external consultants*, for example, need additional reflection, as their influence on brand positioning and corporate branding processes are barely discussed in the brand positioning and corporate branding literature. Respondents have highlighted in all case contexts the importance of relying, as far as possible, on the organizations' own resources in generating strategic position change. This is somewhat contrary to findings from a rebranding process in the nonprofit sector, where internal stakeholders appeared to be more responsive to an agency's unbiased evaluation and professionalism provided (Lee, 2013). However, there was a need in all case study contexts to seek help from external consultants. Utilizing external consultants can be seen as an attempt to facilitate the generation of higher-level brand change discourse by separating strategic positioning episodes from the conventional organizational structure and routines. This finding is generally in accordance with research on the role of strategy consultants (Hendry & Seidl, 2003, p. 178). However, corporate brand positioning project leaders were very aware that the entrepreneurial and decentralized organizational roots, as exemplified by ABB, Trelleborg, and Holmen, required balancing the external input to prevent any negative impact from the strategic positioning discourse. Especially in the absence of a crisis situation or survival circumstances (such as ABB's episode two) and more proactive, incremental, and evolutionary position change, case companies utilized consultants to provide input on how to facilitate and structure the process of positioning the corporate brand, thereby arranging ways of finding a balance between continuity and change so as to move the organizations and respective corporate brands slowly in a different direction. This finding highlights that external consultants, especially brand consultants, are utilized very discreetly in the industrial multi-business contexts of ABB, Trelleborg, and Holmen. The consultant's essential role is to offer creative branding and communication ideas and solutions, conducting research on behalf of the corporate brand director, and offering processual guidance and working steps. These numerous activities resulted in aggregate practices of *catalyzing*, *supporting*, and *guiding*.

As for the role of *business unit delegates* in episodic projects of positioning and repositioning, they are performing the important role of being input and feedback sources for corporate-level project leaders regarding the future development of the corporate brand's position. Delegates or regional responsables are essential for discussing the future development of the corporate brand and in which direction to go. With the help of such delegates, one aims to better connect corporate- and business-level needs within strategic episodes such as marketing council workshops, brand board meetings, or educational seminars. Besides the role of being input and feedback sources, business unit delegates ought to make sure that brand change decisions are properly transferred to the business areas and units, to ensure that the intended brand position expression and approach are supported and utilized. These

activities resulted in practices such as *collaborating*, *transferring*, and *resisting*; the latter, in case proposals needed to be opposed or challenged if delegates were not convinced or satisfied.

*Product area managers* are the ultimate responsables for steering business-led positioning and repositioning projects of products and solutions sold in the name of the corporate brand. They need to make sure to live up to what the corporate brand promises through concrete product, service, and solution manifestations. Their role can be best described as being brand stewards, explaining and showing how to utilize corporate brand position guidelines. Aggregate product area manager practices were, therefore, *testing* and *executing* positioning guidelines, as well as *stewarding* valuable brand assets operationally. The contexts of ABB's Stressometer, Trelleborg's Rubore, and Holmen/Iggesund's Invercote and Incada product name brands have shown this stewardship and nurturing of heritage. This finding adds to previous research on brand stewardship and its role to protect the brand and leverage it for positive value creation in the context of heritage brands (Urde et al., 2007).

Sociologist Howard Becker (1974) argued already 40 years ago that art (an example of a social organization, structure, or system) could be conceived as the product of the cooperative activity of many people. Likewise, corporate brand positioning strategies can be conceived as the product of many actors' collective actions. Collective activity makes it possible for an event to occur, such as brand change workshops, global management conferences, or pilot implementation seminars; conventions then place strong constraints on the focal actor of a profession (Becker, 1974), such as the corporate brand manager in the present thesis. In essence, conventions are enablers and barriers at the same time, interplaying with the agency. The political dimension of running a brand change project, as illustrated in this thesis, highlights these conventional constraints within an institutional context, but also accentuates the dependence between multiple actors in bringing forward a strategy project. Also, just as the firm can be conceived as a political coalition with potential inherent conflicts (March, 1962) or as a political systems in metaphorical terms (Morgan, 2006), so can corporate brand change agents be understood as political brokers that negotiate with a variety of internal stakeholders. Now, how is this collective action of internal and external agents related to market and brand orientation?

## Market- and Brand-Oriented Positioning

By revising the positioning concept and suggesting an alternative way to categorize existing contributions from the research area (as discussed in Chapter 2), Urde and Koch (forthcoming) proposed two basic approaches to positioning: market-oriented positioning (MOP) and brand-oriented positioning (BOP). This implies understanding positioning not from the predominant market-oriented (outside-in)



side, but also from a brand-oriented (inside-out) perspective, adding to the discussion of the two fundamental paradigms (Urde et al., 2011; Baumgarth et al., 2013). The identification of five schools of positioning and their separation along a spectrum of market orientation and brand orientation places the residing assumption that positioning is primarily about ‘mind-share’ (as proclaimed by Ries and Trout, 1986) in perspective. Recognizing and distinguishing between different schools of positioning provides new perspectives of the concept in its research areas (that is, marketing, branding, and strategy). What remains to be done is to assess their usefulness as theoretical lenses for analyzing and discussing empirical material. This is precisely the aim of the following section: to understand how different schools of positioning, or combinations thereof, apply over time and across organizational levels.

### ***Schools of Positioning Across Firm Levels and Over Time***

In an attempt to integrate market orientation (MO) and brand orientation (BO) perspectives, Urde, Baumgarth, and Merrilees (2013) explored other possibilities and combinations of the two paradigms, thereby going beyond a ‘tug of war’ between them. Synergistic combinations, more specifically hybrid forms between brand orientation and market orientation, were found to be possible trajectories over time. The process-focused case studies of this thesis offer the opportunity to discuss the development or fortification of brand orientation, market orientation, or hybrid forms in the context of positioning corporate brands over time. Part of these hybrid forms are different schools of positioning (see Figure 4) that have been applied at distinct points in time.

There has been evidence for *jigsaw puzzle-type positioning*, in which the objective is optimization by means of finding unmet customer needs and wants. Over time, brand image surveys can be a driver for brand positioning projects, but they essentially also constitute positioning activities, typically occurring during the initial stages of positioning episodes as this study has shown. Finding ‘white spots’ in the market for businesses, or defining the territory for a repositioned corporate brand are prime examples of outside-in, market-oriented activities.

*Wordplay-type positioning* was evident when activities revolved around drafting communication material in collaboration with external brand consultants to creatively differentiate the brand or running workshops to define an intended position with words. In these occasions, the objective was to find mental space to position the brand’s message in the minds of customers and other stakeholders – a mostly market-oriented activity that possesses brand-oriented elements.

*Chess-type positioning* occurred when brand-related position issues were discussed in conjunction with overall corporate strategy, as well as when decisions regarding the focus or refocus on specific wanted position attribute of the brand, for example in

times of crisis, needed chess-type thinking and acting. Linking competitive positioning of the corporation and its business areas and units, and the link with the strategic positioning of the corporate brand required multi-level involvement to achieve the goal of finding a fit between the corporate strategy and the brand strategy with brand- and market-oriented elements.

The *dominoes-type positioning* school; that is, matching values in order to build a 'line' of linked values, was evident when case companies were engaged in selecting market positions based upon brand identity to fortify them over time. Drawing on track record and heritage, a brand-oriented inside-out approach, and developing this in an evolutionary manner was the logical choice for ABB, Trelleborg, and Holmen.

The *wild-card poker-type positioning* objective to find new, untapped market space and bypass competition was evident mostly on business levels. Successful businesses such as ABB Stressometer, Trelleborg Rubore, or Iggesund Paperboard all have their independent heritage where entrepreneurs once upon a time identified and created uncontested market space through innovation. Such wild-card poker positions are now nurtured and built upon in the corporate branding context of much bigger corporations these businesses are now a part of.

### ***Nuancing the Concepts of Market and Brand Orientation***

Organizations as a whole can be market-oriented, brand-oriented, or have a hybrid form. In multi-business firms, however, there is also an internal dimension that needs to be taken into account on the grounds of many decentralized sub-divisions that represent enormous businesses themselves. It has been mentioned elsewhere that in brand-oriented organizations (where values are strongly embedded in the organization's culture), any changes threatening employees' identities are likely to meet high resistance (Fiol, 2001; Lee, 2013). The ABB Stressometer and Trelleborg Rubore embedded cases have precisely shown this mechanism when corporate level imposed changes that were incompatible with the business unit's sub-culture or own cultural heritage. Consequently, there were observable elements of 'keeping true' (Lee, 2013, p. 1135) to oneself and *not* doing everything required by corporate level if it was not assessed as useful for the micro-context of their nurtured business.

The empirical study has shown that there is a second, internal dimension of brand orientation to be taken into account. Take ABB as an example: while the corporate brand ABB can first be assessed from a corporate-level perspective of being more brand- or market-oriented towards its diverse stakeholders, there exists a second observable dimension. The internal relationships between corporate level and multiple business units can be understood from a brand orientation perspective. During ABB's corporate-level plans to reposition the brand towards an industrial IT leader around the millennium (a rather market-oriented move, following the trend of

IT developments), ABB Force Measurement resisted to implement changes that would have resulted in removing their heritage brand name 'Stressometer' from their product's communication. This example shows how the same corporation can be at the same time market-oriented (ABB corporate level) *and* brand-oriented (ABB Force Measurement business level). This resulting friction can be destructive, but importantly, it can also be a "productive friction" (Stark, 2010, p. 6), as it might keep the overall organization and its brand on course. This finding responds to the call by Gyrd-Jones, Helm, and Munk (2013) to explore an "approach to brand orientation that encompasses variety whilst maintaining the cohesiveness of the brand" (p. 1073). From this perspective, the brands on ABB business level (ABB and Stressometer) had become a strategic platform for action and interaction with the target groups and were, thus, not limited to being an unconditional response to what was demanded by *corporate level internally*. This adds to the brand orientation dimension of not unconditionally responding to what *customers externally* demand at any given time. In this way, the discussion of market orientation and brand orientation goes beyond a simplified outside-in and inside-out distinction and taking internal dynamics and friction into account instead.

# Chapter 10 | Contributions

The aim of this thesis was to explore the process of corporate brand positioning in industrial multi-business firms. I defined corporate brand positioning as the firm-level management process that intentionally gives a corporate brand a position in markets and minds. I asked one central question: How does corporate brand positioning occur over time? I examined what constitutes the positioning process, as in where and when positioning occurs (that is, location and timing), why it occurs (that is, drivers), what occurs (that is, activities, choices, and challenges), and who is involved (that is, actors and their roles). The study proposes that exploring corporate brand positioning processes over time is indispensable, as doing so offers a more realistic understanding of how such ‘journeys’ unfold. The findings refined the established positioning concept, which now received a deeper meaning. Corporate brand positioning episodes are essentially change management phenomena, in which organizations reactively or proactively respond to internal or external developments. Importantly, brand positioning theory needs to integrate the context, activities, choices, and challenges of managing position change, *and* the input factors required to achieve intended position outcomes.

## Theoretical Contributions and Implications

This thesis’ suggested contributions build on the interaction between the concept and practice of brand positioning. It operates on two research levels (organizational and individual) and in three main research fields (brand positioning, corporate brand management, and organizational change). Moreover, this thesis contributes methodologically by combining retrospective and real-time case studies with longitudinal elements in order to capture the impact of internal and external changes on positioning and repositioning strategies over time. There have been many calls for such approaches in brand management (see, for example, Miller et al., 2014; Yakimova & Beverland, 2005), with little accomplished. Analyzing interviews, organizational text, and meeting observations over different periods of time enabled various elements of positioning strategizing to be identified. This contributed empirically to the knowledge of cross-level strategy development processes in industrial multi-business firms.

Beyond that, this thesis suggests seven key contributions: (1) *Understanding corporate brand positioning as a dynamic and episodic process*, (2) *Revealing corporate brand positioning across levels and over time*, (3) *Identifying key corporate brand positioning drivers*, (4) *Outlining key stages in corporate brand positioning projects*, (5) *Identifying key practitioners and practices of corporate brand positioning*, (6) *Comprehending corporate brand positioning episodes as change processes*, and (7) *Refining the discussion on market- and brand-oriented positioning*. The following section elaborates upon each of these contributions.

### **(1) Understanding corporate brand positioning as a dynamic process**

The first and overarching contribution is offering an alternative view on positioning, seeing it as a complex and dynamic intra-organizational process and empirically researching the phenomenon in this way. Therefore, distinguishing between the static ‘position’ notion and the dynamic ‘positioning’ notion was important. This conceptual contribution initiates the need to shift the focus of brand positioning research from explaining the extent of realized positions with static variance theory (that is, using terms of relationships among dependent and independent variables) to explaining the development of intended positions with dynamic process models (that is, using terms of the sequence of events leading to an outcome). By clarifying the episodic nature of brand positioning processes, this study conceptually demarcates it from continuous brand management activities. In this way, this study mitigates the diagnosis that “the entire enterprise of branding itself can be understood as an exercise in positioning” (Marsden, 2002, p. 307).

Within the context of multi-business corporate brands operating in industrial markets, a processual understanding allowed me to classify ‘corporate brand positioning’ as a complex process that needs management, coordination, and integration. This requires a broader perspective on positioning than what has been previously assumed in the context of consumer brands. In a traditional consumer product brand positioning context, the brand manager starts by defining the core consumers, followed by identifying a consumer insight, which the brand then finally addresses with a focused proposition (de Pelsmacker et al., 2007; Jowitt & Lury, 2012). Typical implications of this rather simplistic idea are to enhance the understanding of the brand’s consumers to help brand managers develop a better and more appealing offer. This conceptualization of the positioning concept is too narrow, and risks limiting our understanding of corporate brands and their positioning practice. In essence, multi-business firms need to be ‘ambidextrous’ (the ability to use the left and right hands equally well) to achieve a high-level differentiated corporate brand position that must at once be relevant for multiple stakeholders and ensure specific businesses’ adaptability and integration with customized value propositions. This has implications for traditional aspects of conceptualizing positioning. Corporate brand positioning in multi-business firms is

less about finding a distinct and valuable place for the brand in the mind of *the* prospect by means of a competitor orientation (Keller, 2012; Ries & Trout, 1986, 2001); instead it is about highlighting target group-relevant value and uniqueness to varying degrees. A high-level differentiated corporate brand position is achieved through highlighting aspects of communal belonging (geared towards internal stakeholders) and aspects of recognizable corporate ability (geared towards external stakeholders). This high-level corporate brand position then provides the arena for product adaptability and integration by customized value propositions that focus on customer benefits and values.

## **(2) Revealing corporate brand positioning across levels and over time**

A second contribution is to reveal the positioning process across levels and over time. Corporate brand positioning is a recurring phenomenon that appears in the form of corporate-level macro-episodes. Such macro-episodes begin with a realization of a need to change, continue with the development of strategies, and eventually dissolve into continuous brand management activities after implementation. Essentially, corporate brand positioning processes alternate between corporate and business levels over time. This implies that the responsibility for corporate brand positioning also resides on business level, and is, therefore, more than a 'corporate-level marketing' activity (Balmer, 2001; 2009). This thesis argues for the strategic importance of a change of perspective regarding the ultimate responsibility for corporate brand positioning. It is both corporate- and business-level managers that are responsible for mutually shaping the corporate brand's intended position, with the CEO still having the mandate to approve or decline brand position project proposals.

The corporate brand positioning process model facilitates understanding the complexity of managing corporate brand positioning processes across several organizational levels. It adds to the intellectual tradition of process research as it increases the understanding of 'strategy-making' (see, for example, Burgelman, 1996). The positioning process model offers insights into the 'black box' of reoccurring events, activities, and choices of 'strategizing for positioning' episodes. Key distinctive features are the two organizational levels that are essential for positioning: corporate level and business level. On a corporate level (exemplified by CEO and corporate brand management practices), process patterns revolve around activities such as buying-in, organizing, analyzing, imagining, involving, and integrating. On a business level (exemplified by business-level delegates and product area management practices), positioning strategies ought to be implemented in concrete products and solution manifestations. In essence, corporate-level positioning episodes clarify and guide, while business-level positioning episodes apply and integrate.

Empirical evidence of corporate brand positioning processes has further shown the importance of a third level; that is, the interaction connecting the corporate and business levels during position planning. The interaction illustrates the temporary

level that consists of micro-episodes of reflective strategic practice during brand position change projects. Strategic events such as cross-group interviews with business-level managers, brand-change workshops with business-level brand delegates, brand education and pilot implementation workshops with business directors are important sources for brand positioning. During such one- or two-day events outside the normal work routines of corporate- and business-level managers, the necessary space for strategic thinking (or rethinking) is provided, facilitating constructive dialogue and compromise. Integrative effects are achieved (see, for example, Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009) when the diverse business unit delegates come together under a common strategic goal and pursue participation and communication. As for the external actor level, consultants, for example, are the ones who facilitate position planning or implementation.

### **(3) Identifying key drivers of corporate brand positioning**

Third, this study shows how change patterns in business ownership, internal conditions, and the external environment drive corporate- and business-level positioning. Discovering the triggers for corporate rebranding projects, such as M&A activities, strategic divestments, or an outdated image, is not entirely new (see, for example, Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006; Roper & Fill, 2012). However, the findings in this thesis deepen the understanding of these corporate-level brand change categories with many examples and add the business-level perspective. In most cases, corporate-level drivers (such as ‘climbing the customer value chain’) mirror similar business-level drivers. Yet, business-level drivers are more concrete, given that business unit and product-area positioning approaches evolve from the actual operations and the necessity to stand out in a particular market segment. On a more general basis, this study also highlights the reactive and proactive nature of position change drivers. For example, external drivers (such as a crisis situation) to change position were found to be rather reactive. Internal drivers, such as newly hired managers acting as change agents, were rather proactive. Finally, corporate- and business-level drivers of positioning episodes were not exclusively business ownership-, internal-, or external-related, but also included several of these elements that in most cases coincide with driving positioning and repositioning projects.

### **(4) Outlining key stages in corporate brand positioning projects**

The identification of seven corporate brand positioning stages that occur in corporate-level macro-episodes constitutes the fourth contribution. The actual activities of corporate brand positioning as they unfold are: ‘buying-in’, ‘arranging’, ‘analyzing’, ‘imagining’, ‘specifying’, ‘educating’, and ‘implementing’. This implies that, now, the field of corporate brand management has more realistic insights into how positioning ‘journeys’ evolve, including important content and process choices.

Instead of only relying on simplified, conceptual, or normative step-by-step models, the stage model, together with the process model, highlights temporal precision and contextual challenges. The stages add additional substance to cycles of corporate brand-building processes (Schultz, 2005; Schultz & Hatch, 2003), especially during macro-episodes when corporate brand strategy formation and positioning coincide. However, corporate brand repositioning episodes have shown that core identity and value aspects are not repeatedly renegotiated; instead, brand identity aspects are slightly updated, or additional identity aspects are added to the core ones.

Moreover, this study has distinguished two types of outcomes; one is realized market and mind positions that gradually build-up, but also alter over time as a response to implementing intended brand positions externally. Another type of outcome is more micro in nature, and is produced during positioning macro-episodes (for example, strategic manifestations or external pilot implementation). Micro outcomes are not immediately understood as changes in market position or reputation. This implies that longer-term, external corporate brand positions may be partly determined by shorter-term, internal brand positioning outcomes.

#### **(5) Identifying key practitioners and practices of corporate brand positioning**

Corporate brand positioning is a process of collective action in need of being carefully managed, coordinated, and integrated across and beyond organizational levels. This study suggests that exploring the praxis, practices, and practitioners of corporate brand positioning is indispensable, as it offers a more realistic understanding of how strategic positioning episodes unfold. Developing an understanding of the positioning complexity resulted in identifying five key practitioner groups and their routinized practices as a fifth contribution. While this study highlights the important role of top management (see also Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006) it also goes beyond existing studies on brand positioning or corporate branding that focus primarily on the contributions of the CEO and top management who influence brand strategy formation and the intended position of the brand.

The *CEO* and the executive management formally represent the ultimate brand endorsers, being the decisive weight for the success of an eventual corporate brand positioning project. Thus, their aggregate practices have been found to comprise *authorizing*, *gatekeeping*, and *sponsoring* positioning work operationally run by corporate brand management. *Corporate brand management* leaders steer corporate-led positioning change as operational project managers, internally. In essence, their role revolves around practices such as *reflecting*, *mediating*, and *coordinating* positioning project content between superiors, executive management, brand consultants, and business unit delegates. *External brand consultants* co-conduct important parts of the actual brand analysis and creativity work; they also facilitate generating higher-level brand change discourse by separating strategic positioning episodes from the conventional organizational structure and routines. Their practices have been



summarized as *catalyzing*, *supporting*, and *guiding*. *Business-level brand delegates* are acting as input and feedback sources for future brand development; that is, what intended position to choose, and transferring intended corporate brand position changes to the respective business units. In essence, they engage in practices of *collaborating*, *transferring*, and may also *resist* changes that are deemed as threatening to business unit branding and positioning routines. Finally, *product area management* steers business-led product and solution positioning and repositioning projects. Their practices comprise *testing* and *executing* positioning guidelines, as well as *stewarding* valuable brand assets operationally.

The above has implications concerning current thinking in brand positioning and corporate branding. For example, the brand manager is not the only one making decisions, as is often assumed in brand positioning literature (Brooksbank, 1994; Riezebos & van der Grinten, 2012). The content of a corporate brand positioning process is, in fact, a legitimization product shaped by political considerations from corporate- and business-level managers. Therefore, this study adds to a practice perspective on strategy, referring to socially accomplished activities, constructed through actions, interactions, and negotiations of multiple actors (Whittington, 2007; Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009) in a corporate brand management context.

#### **(6) Comprehending corporate brand positioning episodes as change processes**

This thesis also contributes by bringing organizational change theories into corporate brand positioning conceptualizations. Understanding corporate brand positioning as occurring over time implies that positioning and repositioning are essentially change management episodes as organizations reactively or proactively respond to internal or external developments that require elements of change, but also continuity. This thesis has shown how positioning activities are characterized by episodic and continuous change elements, and how change agents balance pace and receptivity by keeping momentum going. The risk of losing momentum and the tendency for change processes to run out of energy (Pettigrew et al., 2001) are exemplified by delays in positioning projects caused by many rounds of discussions or approval-waiting loops. In this respect, pace is also coupled with a risk of brand dilution by too many compromises. One way of keeping momentum, once the change project has been started but is stuck in approval-waiting loops, is through continuous internal communication events (for example, presentations, meetings, and workshops) to maintain the desired level of urgency.

As for deeper change processes, this thesis contributes by uncovering corporate brand positioning as a phenomenon driven by a variety of change mechanisms including evolution, life cycle, dialectics, teleology, sensemaking, and culture explanations (Kezar, 2001; Langley, 2011; Van den Ven & Poole, 1995; Weick & Quinn, 1999). These composite explanations shed light on different aspects of corporate brand

positioning organizational processes reinforcing one another. The evolutionary, life cycle, and cultural characters of position change were visible on an organizational level. Recurring positioning episodes slowly changing the organization and its brand (evolution), institutionalized positioning procedure as exemplified in the seven stages of positioning (life cycle), and intervening with distinct language and values (culture) contribute to understanding the mechanisms of positioning. Teleology, dialectics, and sensemaking were evident on group and individual levels. Initiatives and creativity of individual change leaders to influence the process (teleology), conflict related to autonomy and control within and across organizational levels (dialectics), and managing language and dialogue for freezing and rebalancing positioning strategy (sensemaking) equally contribute to understanding the mechanisms of position change over time. Finally, this study adds to the understanding of first-order change characteristics ('prescribed change', as in life cycle and evolution) as well as second-order change ('constructed and emergent change' as in dialectics and teleology) in the context of positioning strategy development. In essence, positioning develops and interplays between managerial agency (teleological and dialectical elements) *and* structural, institutional, or environmental constraints (evolutionary and life cycle elements) over time.

#### **(7) Refining the discussion on market- and brand-oriented positioning**

Finally, this study contributes by discussing brand- and market-oriented positioning across organizational levels and over time. The recognition and distinction between different schools of positioning provided new perspectives of the concept in its research areas (Urde & Koch, forthcoming). This thesis empirically illustrates how different schools of positioning have been applied at distinct points over time. Moreover, it adds to the discussion regarding the two fundamental brand and market orientation paradigms (Urde et al., 2011) and, more specifically, responds to calls for exploring brand orientation in the B2B context (Baumgarth et al., 2013). Contrary to previous brand orientation and market orientation research that focuses on *the* organization, the cases in this thesis have shown how the same corporation can be at the same time market-oriented (for example, on corporate level) *and* brand-oriented (for example, on business level). The resulting friction can be a productive one, as it might keep the overall organization and its brand 'on course', following the dialectical mechanism of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Thus, the corporate brand and its various business-level manifestations are not limited to being an unconditional response to what was *internally* demanded by *corporate level*. This adds to the brand orientation dimension of not unconditionally responding to what *customers externally* demand at any given time (Urde, 1999).

# Managerial Implications

Projects intended to position a corporate brand and its multiple businesses may, if not well managed, take many resources and excessive amounts of time, become costly, and be potentially destructive for both the business and the brand(s). Thus, managers need to know the challenges of strategizing for positioning to be better prepared when assigned to leading change. The investigation of organizational processes to position corporate brands illustrates that corporate brand positioning challenges are different across firm levels. Thus, I offer “role-relevant” managerial implications (Jaworski, 2011) for differently situated managers on corporate- and business-levels as well as for cross-level collaboration.

## *Corporate-Level Brand Managers*

This thesis identifies enablers and barriers in the process of *clarifying* and *guiding* a corporate brand toward the intended position. For example, a project leader with the responsibility and accountability for the corporate brand and corporate communication needs to consider how to make use of enablers (for instance, creating a close link between corporate and business level) and how to overcome barriers (for instance, brand position dilution by over-compromising) in the process of reaching an intended position.

First, the CEO represents the ultimate endorser and guardian of the corporate brand by sponsoring projects and authorizing ultimate decisions. In the CEO's role it is important to find a balance between being generally supportive and being particularly critical to details of the planned changes over the course of the positioning process. For corporate brand project leaders, being operationally in charge of managing intended position change, initial activities require compelling attempts to convince superiors and to succeed in buy-in to the CEO (even though CEOs might initiate a positioning or repositioning process). Trelleborg's latest repositioning process illustrates how operational leaders need to think ahead of their superiors to envision the process and argue for its usefulness on several buy-in accounts. Based on this case, the success of a positioning process depends on these initial and continuous buy-in efforts. Corporate brand managers leading the change process are advised to continuously aim to win internal commitment on corporate and business levels throughout the process.

Second, increased responsiveness towards business-level managers and their needs, as well as giving adequate space for contributions are called for in developing a corporate brand position and platform that is supposed to be relevant for most, if not all, organizational members. Considering the experience of ABB and Trelleborg's positioning project leaders, managers in similar roles and situations are advised to

utilize the right amount of ‘pull’ and ‘push’ management approaches in mutually shaping the positioning process from corporate to business level and vice versa. The challenge, then, is to manage the balance between empowered bottom-up processes and strict top-down processes in the course of finding a brand position story that needs to avoid an overly-narrow and overly-loose vision or revision of an intended corporate brand position for multiple businesses. Developing an overly-narrow corporate brand position (that is, very specific points-of-parity and points-of-differentiation) might result in that the intended position will not be relevant to all diverse parts of a corporate brand offering multiple products and services. Developing an overly-loose corporate brand position (that is, very broad points-of-parity and points-of-differentiation) might result in that by trying to be ‘everything for everyone’, the intended position will be meaningless. When facing this dilemma of inclusiveness, it is suggested to not overly-compromise, so as to avoid brand dilution already in an early stage of positioning or repositioning the corporate brand.

Third, it is crucial to secure business unit applicability of planned position frameworks and statements before changing elements of an intended positioning strategy. In this respect, the challenge is to convince businesses to adjust their current approaches during corporate brand positioning projects. Corporate brand managers, being confronted with the challenge of not having a strong mandate to enforce changes in decentralized organizations, such as was the case in Trelleborg, are advised to make sure that businesses are willing and able to leverage the updated corporate brand position for specific business customization. By providing better and stronger brand position and communication rationales than those of existing guidelines, this challenge is likely to be mastered successfully. Thus, the risk for later tensions between corporate and business levels is significantly reduced.

Fourth, finding a trustworthy and reliable external consulting partner for corporate brand positioning is an important challenge in the early stages of the project, as positioning episodes in ABB, Trelleborg, and Holmen have shown. Due to a lack of internal resources both in terms of brand proficiency and manpower, external brand consultants offer inspirational and creative value provision, as well as, potentially, a track-record of expertise and an ‘outsider’ perspective to help facilitate and structure the process of positioning the corporate brand. Those responsible for the project need to inform their decision-making process by asking, for example: What relevant reference cases does the consultancy offer? What structure, models, and processes are suggested? Is an international network with additional competences and reference cases provided? Will the consultancy help to focus the organization and its management on the goal at hand? Once the decision regarding the external consulting partner is made, corporate brand managers are advised to prevent potential conflicts between external ‘creative’ and internal ‘business’ mindsets by acting as a compensating pole, mediating between these two approaches.

Finally, constant internal brand communication is called for to keep a high level of internal awareness and to create lasting brand engagement. All positioning cases

examined have supported this conclusion. Project leaders are advised to be aware of potential time delays in the process. This is due to positioning's political dimension, exemplified by continuous rounds of executive management 'upstream' buy-in (such as CEO and business area presidents), corporate-level functions 'sidestream' buy-in (such as Investor Relations and Human Resources), and business-level 'downstream' buy-in (such as business directors and product managers). While the downside of such time delays might be a loss of momentum for intensive change, benefits can be found in deeper internal anchoring of planned changes (such as winning over doubters). Ultimately, a CEO is advised to also be aware of positioning process' time dimension and to carefully calculate the opportunities (for example, enduring change anchoring) and risks (for example, losing change momentum) of delaying the change process. Since intended corporate brand position decisions are linked to the corporation's competitive strategy, it is advisable to keep a high level of credibility.

### ***Business-Level Brand Managers***

Business-level managers, such as product brand or market communication managers need to consider enablers and barriers in the process of *applying and integrating* a corporate brand towards an intended position for concrete solution manifestations. Corporate level-led change projects may not be required on the business level, since some units in a multi-business firm have a well-working positioning strategy and flourishing business. In some situations planned changes may initially be seen with resistance and opposition. There might have been earlier corporate-driven projects that have been less successful or were even destructive for the business.

First, a business-level manager is typically assigned to transfer intended corporate brand position changes to the respective business areas. The responsibility includes to make sure that brand elements and meaning are supported across the group and live up to what the corporate brand promises in concrete product and solution manifestations (such as the ABB Stressometer flatness control systems, the Trelleborg Rubore brake shims, or the Iggesund Paperboard packaging solutions). In other words, once business-level managers have received new value propositions from the corporate brand, the task is to integrate corporate brand specifications in business-led positioning projects of products and solutions offered in the name of the corporate brand. Considering that business units in multi-business firms, and the products and solutions marketed, are not only exposed to the corporate-level values but essentially have 'their own life', business-level brand delegates and product-level brand stewards are advised to both understand the longterm ambition of the corporate brand *and* the business-specific needs of fortifying or changing market and mind positions. This implies that business-level project leaders need to base their choices (accepting, partly accepting, resisting, or partly resisting changes) on what is desirable for the whole group (such as creating an umbrella position of communal belonging) and at the

same time improves (or at least does not deteriorate) long-nurtured business-brand practices (such as creating specific market- and competitive-related points of differentiation). Importantly, frictions between corporate and business levels are not necessarily destructive. Frictions can be productive, in case they are based on feasible considerations of the product area (as illustrated by ABB Force Measurement and Trelleborg Sealing Solutions Kalmar). Importantly, a business-level project leader's veto might save the overall corporate brand from taking risky decisions, thereby keeping the overall organization on course.

Second, by utilizing brand positions defined in words ('brand positioning statements') and brand position design guidelines ('visual brand identity'), business-level managers can secure consistency in concrete product development and communication processes. By monitoring the R&D department in such product development processes, business-level managers can ensure that brand design guidelines for an intended corporate brand position are actually incorporated. The ABB Force Measurement context has illustrated this strategy that, at the same time, also keeps a high level of internal brand awareness. Linking business-level stories (narrow and specific) to the overall corporate-level brand position story (broad and general) further ensures consistency in trust and reputation building for both the corporate brand and its multiple businesses in subsequent market communication processes.

Third, business-level managers in multi-business firms need to specify corporate brand position elements (such as multi-audience position statements) by adding explicit strengths and capabilities of products and solutions in order to increase brand tangibility towards the customer audience. In case business units lack internal resources such as manpower, business-level project leaders and product-area managers might also want to seek assistance for facilitating and structuring position implementation in pilot projects or routine product development processes. Moreover, managers should aim to break out of 'silo thinking', since a united positioning approach might lead to an increased cross-selling potential across the multiple businesses in the long term, even in organizations where customers and segments may differ considerably.

Fourth, products and solutions that may not be easily differentiable beyond mere and solid function can be branded to convey the overall intended position of the corporate brand; this can be done by 'surfing on the corporate brand wave' and its reputation. In this way, most of the diverse businesses operating under the umbrella of the corporate brand can be kept at the same high-level corporate brand position if they can live up to the premium position criteria set by corporate brand and policy guidelines.

Finally, considering overall external challenges in global business markets such as price pressure from customers and competition, emerging markets' pressure for consolidation and focus, or the aging of products and increasing commoditization, strategies for survival or strategies for staying ahead of competition are required.

Business-level brand delegates might want to assess tactical brand possibilities for extending towards 'mid-segments' in order to increase market opportunities. In case such mid-market offerings are not in-line with a potential 'high-quality / high-price' position, alternatives in brand strategy and architecture should be evaluated so as to not dilute a carefully developed corporate brand position. Utilizing a daughter brand strategy could be one option to leverage market opportunities and decrease the risk of brand confusion. Importantly, however, such decisions need to be developed in collaboration between business- and corporate-level stakeholders.

### ***Collaborative Positioning Across Firm Levels***

Corporate brand positioning processes, including their activities and results, need to be conceived as the product of many actors (such as CEOs, executive management, corporate brand project leaders, business-level brand delegates, product-area managers, and consultants) and their collective actions, both on the corporate level and the business level. In other words, corporate brand positioning is a product of cross-level interaction and collaboration (see Figure 30). To facilitate such collaboration processes, the present study suggests seven guidelines based on the corporate brand positioning cases analyzed in this thesis and general change management recommendations (see, for example, Kotter, 1995).

#### **(1) Envisioning the intended position**

Envisioning the corporate brand's intended position is mainly carried out by the CEO. The CEO is the ultimate endorser and guardian of the corporate brand and is responsible for broadly aligning an organization along three key criteria: the reason for being, beyond simply 'doing business and make money' (that is, mission and vision); the organization's values leading up to a promise (that is, its brand core); and the preferred direction for the corporate brand (that is, its intended position). Whenever there are changes to a corporate strategy that also concern the corporate brand's position, CEOs typically authorize corporate brand project leaders to operationally manage intended position change. It is advisable for CEOs to find a balance between being generally supportive of and specifically critical of details of the intended changes. By doing so, the CEO is more likely to convince stakeholders, ranging from the board of directors to powerful managers on corporate and business levels, thereby maintaining a high level of credibility.

#### **(2) Building a brand coalition**

Corporate-level brand managers who are assigned to operationally run positioning projects are advised to form a brand coalition across firm levels (for example, among

the CEO, superiors, brand consultants, and business unit delegates). This should be done to facilitate enforcement of changes in decentralized multi-business firms and to reduce the risk of unproductive tensions later in the process. Importantly, project leaders are advised to create a sense of urgency by implementing planned changes early on in the mental and physical agendas of multi-business firms' key people. This is advisable even if positioning projects might not be as urgent as a severe crisis situation.

### **(3) Arranging for reflective positioning dialogues**

To arrange for reflective positioning dialogues it is recommended to organize brand workshops with corporate- and business-level participants. These workshops can create the opportunity for reflective strategic practice, since the day-to-day routine structures of communication and hierarchy get suspended. This facilitates creative exchange at eye height. Such workshops and seminars are important not only for discussing new and/or changing strategies impacting both corporate and business levels but also for adjusting, confirming, or reinforcing those strategies during the course of the project. Solidly analyzing and grounding intended corporate brand positions in such an environment also helps reduce potential barriers for later implementing the updated positioning strategy across firm levels. Content wise, it is suggested that 'corporate ability' position elements (broad and general) should be highlighted at the corporate level, while at the business level, more clearly refined position approaches should specify concrete 'customer benefits' with prototypical claims and solution elements (narrow and specific).

### **(4) Balancing participation and authority**

Corporate-level project leaders are advised to discuss their intended brand position scenarios with the members of the brand coalition. This requires them to actively involve business-level stakeholders, which ensures the development of an inclusive brand position. Successful implementation later in the process is likely to be facilitated when business-level managers feel they are being heard and see the benefits from the intended changes for their particular business. However, being overly compromising is not suggested, so as to avoid brand dilution already early in the process. Once an overall position theme has been identified and agreed upon, business-level brand delegates are advised to control the proper transfer of brand change decisions to business units and product areas.

### **(5) Keeping momentum going**

Positioning projects, like many change processes, tend to run out of energy and lose momentum (caused, for example, by many rounds of discussions or approval-waiting



loops). One way of keeping momentum going is to maintain the desired level of urgency. This can be executed by means of continuous internal communication events, such as presentations, meetings, and/or workshops. Furthermore, project leaders are advised to continuously manage language and dialogue. Two strategies can be used: ‘arguing well’ (for example, focusing an argumentation related to creating better business) and ‘speaking differently’ (for example, revolving a strategic conversation around a key theme). Both strategies are likely to generate lasting changes that are linked to an individual’s learning processes.

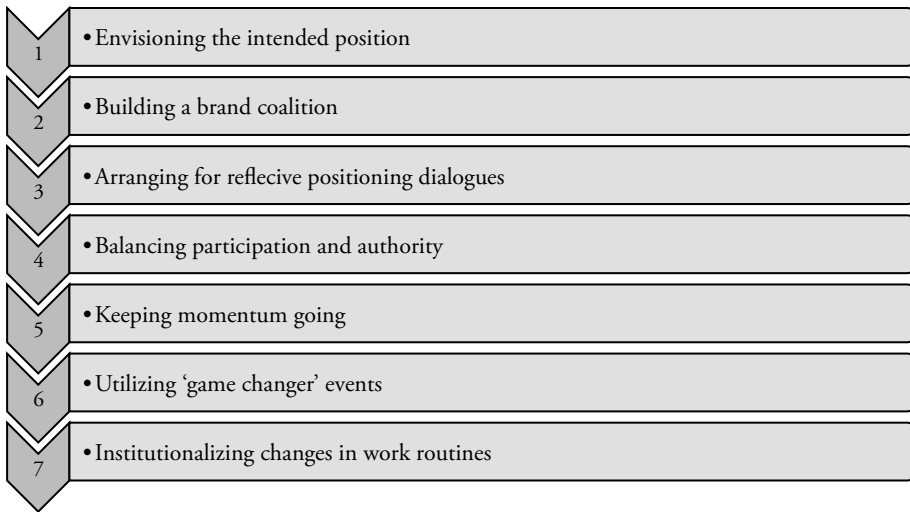
#### **(6) Utilizing ‘game changer’ events**

In order to leverage internal brand change, it is advisable to seek and utilize initial external implementation events, such as industry fairs or investor relation summits. Such events are likely to trigger positive reactions by external critics (for example, the financial community) and can therefore function as internal ‘game changers’. Essentially, the external positive reactions tend to evoke very favorable internal firm dynamics and persuade internal skeptics (for example, product-area managers), which importantly, will support internal brand position acceptance and implementation. This will most likely create short-term successes, but will also consolidate, nuance, and improve intended position guidelines in the mid-to-long term.

#### **(7) Institutionalizing changes in work routines**

Once an overall agreement has been achieved and signed off by the CEO and the executive management, it is important to institutionalize the new guidelines and approach. This involves many actors including the CEO, corporate brand project leaders, business-level brand delegates, and product area managers. Accordingly, it is important to assign clear roles and responsibilities on both corporate and business levels. On business level, the product area manager is ultimately responsible for steering business-led positioning projects. Product area managers, who are testing and executing positioning guidelines as well as stewarding valuable brand assets operationally need to make sure that concrete offerings live up to what the corporate brand promises.

In conclusion, the above guidelines should be understood as what they are: broad guidelines, not narrow recipes. The context of organizations and their different trajectories are too important to carve these points in stone. Ultimately, however, they may provide managers with a foundation to reflect upon when assigned to positioning change processes (Figure 31).



**Figure 31**

Guidelines for facilitating cross-level positioning collaboration processes

## Limitations and Future Research Directions

This thesis contributes to the field of brand positioning and corporate branding by increasing the understanding of how corporate brand positioning unfolds over time. As is the case for most research, it contains several limitations that demand consideration; at the same time, these limitations suggest directions for future research.

First, the conclusions drawn primarily concern complex, mature, and decentralized industrial multi-business corporate brands. Conclusions need to be treated with caution, even though I expect the findings to also be relevant in other organizational settings, due to the selection of various brand architecture contexts. Considering my view on knowledge as discussed in the methodology section, it is unlikely to completely reveal just any social situation; there can be no definitive criteria to judge the ‘truth’ of this particular version of corporate brand positioning, and only further empirical material can distinguish it from alternative explanations. It is especially the task of the community of (brand management) researchers to debate such explanations thoroughly and critically (Easton, 2010). There are many unexplored brand architecture contexts, which can provide further insights into the practices that constitute positioning processes. One possibility would be to investigate which patterns and mechanisms of corporate brand positioning are similar and different in the business-to-consumer market context of corporate brands. However, future

research should not remain solely bonded to corporate brands and their positioning process. In fact, the conceptual development of brand positioning as a process would greatly benefit from insights into other contexts. How and why does the brand positioning process vary when applied to different contexts? In the context of product brand positioning, the Iggesund Paperboard cases have already illustrated that product brand positioning processes also take time and are far from being 'easy fixes', something normative models tend to assume. However, in order to clearly demarcate the difference of what constitutes the process of positioning corporate brands versus product brands, and in order to draw more generalizable conclusions about this difference, further case studies are required. The findings derived from the cases studied in this thesis can be utilized as a blueprint for such future studies.

Second, this study has conceptualized corporate brand positioning from a firm-level and managerial perspective, with data generation limited to managerial practices on the basis of interviews, document studies, and observations. While this contributed to a better understanding of the internal dynamics of positioning corporate brands, it also limited other emerging research perspectives such as co-creation of the brand with external stakeholders (see, for example, Ind et al., 2013; Gyrð-Jones & Kornum, 2013). Future research could address how such individual or group actors possibly inform the positioning process and involve even more ethnographic, longitudinal, and observational elements the present thesis was not able to incorporate. At the same time, future research could involve quantitative data to corroborate some aspects of positioning's dynamic explanations.

Third, all companies studied in the present thesis are based in Europe with two having their headquarters in Sweden. Considering cultural differences in management style (such as the 'Swedish consensus mentality') limits some of the findings related to the management of change. However, these findings could provide a benchmark for studying corporate brand positioning in different countries or regional contexts. Different culture-informed management styles might yield different insights into, for example, the pace of change in positioning and repositioning projects. This again might generate helpful insights into the internal acceptance of position changes.

Fourth, the present study's focus on activities and practices leading to position outcomes is a strength, but also a limitation. Therefore, developing concrete positioning capabilities based on such activities and practices are promising future research directions. For example, an examination of the dynamic capabilities and resource requirements (see, for example, Beverland et al., 2007; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997) underpinning corporate brands occupying 'high-quality/high-price' positions at the broadest level (such as the brands under investigation in this thesis) would be helpful to develop brand positioning theory. Comparatively researching the dynamic capabilities and resource requirements underpinning the positioning processes of differently positioned brands and in different industry or cultural contexts would also be useful.

Finally, it would be promising to investigate how corporate brand positioning unfolds together with other relevant organizational practices such as innovation or, even better, innovating. While the importance of the brand–innovation relationship has been acknowledged (see, for example, Aaker, 2007; Beverland, Napoli, & Farrelly, 2010), such studies do not insist on unpacking brand and innovation entities in order to reveal the processes that are involved in this cross-disciplinary area of branding and innovating. Therefore, exploring the interface between brand positioning and innovation processes is promising for cross-disciplinary theory development.

# References

- Aaker, D. A. (1991). *Managing brand equity*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Aaker, D. A. (1996). *Building strong brands*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Aaker, D. A. (2004). *Brand portfolio strategy*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Aaker, D. A. (2007). Innovation: Brand it or lose it. *California Management Review*, 50(1), 8–24.
- Aaker, D. A. (2008a). *Strategic market management* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.
- Aaker, D. A. (2008b). *Spanning silos*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Aaker, D. A., & Shansby, J. (1982). Positioning your product. *Business Horizons*, 25(3), 56–62.
- Aaker, D. A., & Joachimsthaler, E. (2000). *Brand leadership: Building assets in an information economy*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- ABB Ltd. (2009). *ABB annual report 2009*. Retrieved May 26, 2014, from [http://new.abb.com/docs/default-source/investor-center-docs/annual-report/abb-group-annual-report-2008\\_e.pdf?sfvrsn=2](http://new.abb.com/docs/default-source/investor-center-docs/annual-report/abb-group-annual-report-2008_e.pdf?sfvrsn=2)
- Ahonen, M. (2008). Corporate re-branding process: A preliminary theoretical framework. *Proceedings of the conference on Corporate Communication, Wroxton, UK*.
- Alden, D. L., Steenkamp, J. B. E. M., & Batra, R. (1999). Brand positioning through advertising in Asia, North America, and Europe: The role of global consumer culture. *Journal of Marketing*, 63(1), 75–87.
- Anselmsson, J., & Johansson, U. (2007). Corporate social responsibility and the positioning of grocery brands: An exploratory study of retailer and manufacturer brands at point of purchase. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 35(10), 835–856.
- Arora, R. (2006). Product positioning based on search, experience and credence attributes using conjoint analysis. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 15(5), 285–292.

- Attia, S. T., & Hooley, G. (2007). The role of resources in achieving target competitive positions. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 15(2/3), 91–119.
- Bakken, T., & Hernes, T. (2006). Organizing is both a verb and a noun: Weick meets Whitehead. *Organization Studies*, 27(11), 1599–1616.
- Balmer, J. M. T. (1995). Corporate branding and connoisseurship. *Journal of General Management*, 21(1), 24–46.
- Balmer, J. M. T. (2001). Corporate identity, corporate branding and corporate marketing: Seeing through the fog. *European Journal of Marketing*, 35(3/4), 248–291.
- Balmer, J. M. T. (2009). Corporate marketing: Apocalypse, advent and epiphany. *Management Decision*, 47(4), 544–572.
- Balmer, J. M. T. (2010). Explicating corporate brands and their management: Reflections and directions from 1995. *Journal of Brand Management*, 18(3), 180–196.
- Balmer, J. M. T., & Gray, E. R. (2003). Corporate brands: What are they? What of them? *European Journal of Marketing*, 37(7/8), 972–997.
- Balmer, J. M. T., & Greyser, S. A. (2003). *Revealing the corporation: Perspectives on identity, image, reputation, corporate branding, and corporate-level marketing*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Barney, J. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, 17(1), 99–120.
- Barnham, C. (2009). Essence – The structure and dynamics of the brand. *International Journal of Market Research*, 51(5), 593–610.
- Baumgarth, C. (2010). “Living the brand”: Brand orientation in the business-to-business sector. *European Journal of Marketing*, 44(5), 653–671.
- Baumgarth, C., Merrilees, B., & Urde, M. (2013). Brand orientation: Past, present and future. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(9/10), 973–1182.
- Becker, H. S. (1974). Art as collective action. *American Sociological Review*, 39(6), 767–776.
- Beverland, M. (2005). Crafting brand authenticity: The case of luxury wines. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(5), 1003–1029.
- Beverland, M., Napoli, J., & Lindgreen, A. (2007). Industrial global brand leadership: A capabilities view. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 36(8), 1082–1093.

- Beverland, M., Napoli, J., & Farrelly, F. (2010). Can all brands innovate in the same way? A typology of brand position and innovation effort. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 27(1), 33–48.
- Bhaskar, R. A. (1975). *A realist theory of science*. London, UK: Verso.
- Bhaskar, R. A. (1979). *The possibility of naturalism: A philosophical critique of the contemporary human science*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.
- Bhat, S., & Reddy, S. K. (1998). Symbolic and functional positioning of brands. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 15(1), 32–43.
- Blankson, C., & Kalafatis, S. P. (2004). The development and validation of a scale measuring consumer/customer-derived generic typology of positioning strategies. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 20(1/2), 5–43.
- Brodie, R. J., & de Chernatony, L. (2009). Towards new conceptualizations of branding: Theories of the middle range. *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), 95–100.
- Brooksbank, R. (1994). The anatomy of marketing positioning strategy. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 12(4), 10–14
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2007). *Business research methods* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Burgelman, R. A. (1983). A process model of internal corporate venturing in the diversified major firm. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 28(2), 223–244.
- Burgelman, R. A. (1996). A process model of strategic business exit: Implications for an evolutionary perspective on strategy. *Strategic Management Journal*, 17(1), 193–214.
- Burke, S. J. (2011). Competitive positioning strength: Market measurement. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 19(5), 421–428.
- Butt, I., Murphy, S. & Papadopoulos, N. (2007). Development of positioning as a research stream: A critical assessment of impediments and a look forward. *Proceedings of the Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy (ANZMAC) conference, Dunedin, New Zealand*.
- Callon, M., Méadel, C., & Rabeharisoa, V. (2002). The economy of qualities. *Economy and Society*, 31(2), 194–217.
- Carroll, J. D., & Green, P. E. (1997). Psychometric methods in marketing research: Part II, multidimensional scaling. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34(2), 193–204.

- Chintagunta, P. K. (1994). Heterogeneous logit model implications for brand positioning. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 31(2), 304–311.
- Chun, R., & Davies, G. (2001). E-reputation: The role of mission and vision statements in positioning strategy. *Journal of Brand Management*, 8(4), 315–333.
- Collins, J., & Porras, J. I. (2004). *Built to last: Successful habits of visionary companies*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Crawford, C. (1985). A new positioning typology. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 4(4), 243–53.
- Csaba, F. F., & Bengtsson, A. (2006). Rethinking identity in brand management. In J. E. Schroeder, & M. Salzer-Mörling (Eds.), *Brand culture* (pp. 118–135). Abingdon: Routledge.
- da Silveira, C., Lages, C., & Simões, C. (2013). Reconceptualizing brand identity in a dynamic environment. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 28–36.
- Datamonitor. (2011). *ABB, Ltd.: Company profile*. Retrieved from Business Source Complete.
- Davies, G., & Chun, A. (2003). The use of metaphor in the exploration of the brand concept. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 19(1/2), 45–71.
- Dawson, P. (2012). The contribution of the processual approach to the theory and practice of organizational change. In D. M. Boje, B. Burnes, & J. Hassard (Eds.), *The routledge companion to organizational change* (pp. 119–132). London, UK: Routledge.
- de Chernatony, L. (1999). Brand management through narrowing the gap between brand identity and brand reputation. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 15(1–3), 157–179.
- de Chernatony, L. (2002). Would a brand smell any sweeter by a corporate name? *Corporate Reputation Review*, 5(2/3), 114–132.
- de Chernatony, L. (2009). Towards the holy grail of defining ‘brand’. *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), 101–105.
- de Chernatony, L. (2010). *From brand vision to brand evaluation – The strategic process of growing and strengthening brands*. Oxford, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann.



- de Pelsmacker, P., Geuens, M., & van den Bergh, J. (2007). *Marketing communications: A European perspective* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Harlow, UK: FT Prentice Hall.
- de Wit, B., & Meyer, R. (2010). *Strategy – Process, content, context* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning.
- Denis, J.-L., Langley, A., & Cazale, L. (1996). Leadership and strategic change under ambiguity. *Organization Studies*, 17(4), 673–699.
- Dibb, S., & Simkin, L. (1991). Targeting, segments and positioning. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 19(3), 4–10.
- Diwan, S. P., & Bodla, B. S. (2011). Development of empirically based customer-derived positioning typology in the automobile industry. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 19(6), 531–550.
- Dru, J.-M. (1996). *Disruption: Overturning conventions and shaking up the marketplace*. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons.
- Du, S., Bhattacharya, C., & Sen, S. (2007). Reaping relational rewards from corporate social responsibility: The role of competitive positioning. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 24(3), 224–241.
- Duncan, T., & Moriarty, S. E. (1998). A communication-based marketing model for managing relationships. *Journal of Marketing*, 62(2), 1–13.
- Easingwood, C., & Mahajan, V. (1989). Positioning of financial services for competitive advantage. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 6(3), 207–219.
- Easton, G. (2002). Marketing: A critical realist approach. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(2), 103–109.
- Easton, G. (2010). Critical realism in case study research. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39(1), 118–128.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532–550.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Martin, J. A. (2000). Dynamic capabilities: What are they? *Strategic Management Journal*, 21(10/11), 1105–1121.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 25–32.
- Esch, F.-R. (2005). *Moderne Markenführung* [Modern brand management] (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Wiesbaden: Gabler.

- Esch, F.-R. (2010). *Strategie und Technik der Markenführung* [Strategy and technique of brand management] (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). München: Vahlen.
- Esch, F.-R., Tomczak, T., Kernstock, J., & Langner, T. (2006). *Corporate Brand Management* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Wiesbaden: Gabler.
- Espeland W., & Sauder, M., (2007). Rankings and reactivity: How public measures recreate social worlds. *American Journal of Sociology*, 113(1), 1–40.
- Ewing, M. T., & Napoli, J. (2005). Developing and validating a multidimensional non-profit brand orientation scale. *Journal of Business Research*, 58(6), 841–853.
- Farjoun, M. (2002). Towards an organic perspective on strategy. *Strategic Management Journal*, 23(7), 561–594.
- Fiol, C. M. (2001). Revisiting an identity-based view of sustainable competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, 27(6), 691–699
- Fleetwood, S. (2005). Ontology in organization and management studies: A critical realist perspective. *Organization*, 12(2), 197–222.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219–245.
- Gensch, D. H., & Javalgi, R. G. (1988). Issues and advances in product positioning models in marketing research. *Mathematical and Computer Modeling*, 10(12), 929–949.
- Ghosh, A. K., & Chakraborty, G. (2004). Using positioning models to measure and manage brand uncertainty. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 13(5), 294–302.
- Gioia, D. A., & Chittipeddi, K. (1991). Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 12(6), 433–448.
- Gorski, P. S. (2013). What is critical realism? And why should you care? *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews*, 42(5), 658–670.
- Gotsi, M., & Andriopoulos, C. (2007). Understanding the pitfalls in the corporate rebranding process. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 12(4), 341–355.
- Grant, R. (2013). *Contemporary strategy analysis* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons.

- Green, P. E., & Krieger, A. M. (1992). An application of a product positioning model to pharmaceutical products. *Marketing Science*, 11(2), 117–132.
- Green, P. E., Krieger, A. M., & Wind, Y. (2001). Thirty years of conjoint analysis: Reflections and prospects. *Interfaces*, 31(3), 56–73.
- Greyser, S. A. (2009). Corporate brand reputation and brand crisis management. *Management Decision*, 47(4), 590–602.
- Gromark, J., & Melin, F. (2011). The underlying dimensions of brand orientation and its impact on financial performance. *Journal of Brand Management*, 18(6), 394–410.
- Grünbaum, N. N. (2007). Identification of ambiguity in the case study research typology: What is a unit of analysis? *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 10(1), 78–97.
- Gummesson, E. (2005). Qualitative research in marketing: Road-map for a wilderness of complexity and unpredictability. *European Journal of Marketing*, 39(3/4), 309–327.
- Gwin, C. F., & Gwin, C. R. (2003). Product attributes model: A tool for evaluating brand positioning. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 11(2), 30–42.
- Gyrd-Jones, R., & Kornum, N. (2013). Managing the co-created brand: Value and cultural complementarity in online and offline multi-stakeholder ecosystems. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(9), 1484–1493.
- Gyrd-Jones, R., Merrilees, B., & Miller, D. (2013). Revisiting the complexities of corporate branding: Issues, paradoxes, solutions. *Journal of Brand Management*, 20(7), 571–589.
- Gyrd-Jones, R., Helm, C., & Munk, J. (2013). Exploring the impact of silos in achieving brand orientation. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(9/10), 1056–1078.
- Hamel, G. (1996). Strategy as revolution. *Harvard Business Review*, 74(4), 69–82.
- Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2001). Are the strategic stars aligned for your corporate brand? *Harvard Business Review*, 79(2), 128–134.
- Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2003). Bringing the corporation into corporate branding. *European Journal of Marketing*, 37(7/8), 1041–1064.
- Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2008). *Taking brand initiative: How companies can align strategy, culture, and identity through corporate branding*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Healy, M., & Perry, C. (2000). Comprehensive criteria to judge validity and reliability of qualitative research within the realism paradigm. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 3(3), 118–126.
- Heding, T., Knudtzen, C. F., & Bjerre, M. (2009). *Brand management: Research, theory and practice*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Heidig, W., Tomczak, T., & Jobin, M. (2013). *ABB: A brand in movement – Branding challenges of a global business-to-business company*. University of St. Gallen Case Study Series No. 513–095–1, St. Gallen, Switzerland: University of St. Gallen Press.
- Hendry, J., & Seidl, D. (2003). The structure and significance of strategic episodes: Social systems theory and the routine practices of strategic change. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(1), 175–196.
- Hollander, P. (2001). Acknowledgments: An academic ritual. *Academic Questions*, 15(1), 63–77.
- Holmen AB. (2014). *Holmen annual report 2013*. Retrieved March 21, 2014, from [http://vp165.alertir.com/afw/files/press/holmen/Holmen\\_Annual\\_report\\_2013.pdf](http://vp165.alertir.com/afw/files/press/holmen/Holmen_Annual_report_2013.pdf)
- Holt, D. (2004). *How brands become icons: The principles of cultural branding*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Holt, D., & Cameron, D. (2010). *Cultural strategy – Using innovative ideologies to build breakthrough brands*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hooley, G., & Saunders, J. (1993). *Competitive positioning*. Hemel Hempstead, UK: Prentice Hall.
- Hooley, G., & Greenley, G. (2005). The resource underpinnings of competitive positions. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 13(2), 93–116.
- Hooley, G., Broderick, A., & Möller, K. (1998). Competitive positioning and the resource-based view of the firm. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 6(2), 97–116.
- Hooley, G., Piercy, N. F., & Nicoulaud, B. (2008), *Marketing strategy and competitive positioning* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Harlow, UK: FT Prentice Hall.
- Hunt, S. D., & Menon, A. (1995). Metaphors and competitive advantage: Evaluating the use of metaphors in theories of competitive strategy. *Journal of Business Research*, 33(2), 81–90.

- Hutzschenreuter, T., & Kleindienst, I. (2006). Strategy-process research: What have we learned and what is still to be explored. *Journal of Management*, 32(5), 673–720.
- IBM. (2013). *Smarter planet conversations*. Retrieved September 18, 2014, from <http://www.ibm.com/smarterplanet/us/en/#/all>
- Ind, N. (2007). *Living the brand* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). London, UK: Kogan Page.
- Ind, N., Iglesias, O., & Schultz, M. (2013). Building brands together: Emergence and outcomes of co-creation. *California Management Review*, 55(3), 5–26.
- Interbrand. (2012). Best global brands 2012. Retrieved September 18, 2014, from <http://www.interbrand.com/de/best-global-brands/2012/Best-Global-Brands-2012.aspx>
- Järventie-Thesleff, R., Moisander, J., & Laine, P.-M. (2011). Organizational dynamics and complexities of corporate brand building – A practice perspective. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 27(2), 196–204.
- Jarzabkowski, P. (2004). Strategy as practice: Recursiveness, adaptation, and practices-in-use. *Organization Studies*, 25(4), 529–560.
- Jarzabkowski, P., & Balogun, J. (2009). The practice and process of delivering integration through strategic planning. *Journal of Management Studies*, 46(8), 1255–1288.
- Jaworski, B. (2011). On managerial relevance. *Journal of Marketing*, 75(4), 211–224.
- Jaworski, B., Kohli, A. K., & Sahay, A. (2000). Market-driven versus driving markets. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 28(1), 45–54.
- Jewell, R. D., & Barone, M. J. (2007). Norm violations and the role of marketplace comparisons in positioning brands. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 35(4), 550–559.
- Johar, J. S., & Sirgy, M. J. (1989). Positioning models in marketing: Toward a normative-integrated model. *Journal of Business Psychology*, 3(4), 475–485.
- Johansson, C., & Heide, M. (2008). Speaking of change: Three communication approaches in studies of organizational change. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 13(3), 288–305.
- Jowitt, H., & Lury, G. (2012). Is it time to reposition positioning? *Journal of Brand Management*, 20(2), 96–103.

- Kalafatis, S. P., Tsogas, M. H., & Blankson, C. (2000). Positioning strategies in business markets. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 15(6), 416–437.
- Kalra, A., & Goodstein, R. C. (1998). The impact of advertising positioning strategies on consumer price sensitivity. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 35(2), 210–224.
- Kapferer, J.-N. (2012). *The new strategic brand management: Creating and sustaining brand equity long term* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). London, UK: Kogan Page.
- Kaplan, S. (2011). Strategy and PowerPoint: An inquiry into the epistemic culture and machinery of strategy making. *Organization Science*, 22(2), 320–346.
- Karpik, L., (2010). *Valuing the unique: The economics of singularities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1–22.
- Keller, K. L. (1999a). Brand mantras: Rationale, criteria, and examples. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 15(1/3), 43–51.
- Keller, K. L. (1999b). Managing brands for the long run: Brand reinforcement and revitalization strategies. *California Management Review*, 41(3), 102–124.
- Keller, K. L. (2012). *Strategic brand management: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: FT Prentice-Hall.
- Keller, K. L., & Lehmann, D. R. (2006). Brands and branding: Research findings and future priorities. *Marketing Science*, 25(6), 740–759.
- Keller, K. L., & Lehmann, D. R. (2009). Assessing long-term brand potential. *Journal of Brand Management*, 17(1), 6–17.
- Keller, K. L., Sternthal, B., & Tybout, A. (2002). Three questions you need to ask about your brand. *Harvard Business Review*, 80(9), 80–89.
- Kezar, A. J. (2001). Understanding and facilitating organizational change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report*, 28(4), 1–147.
- Kim, W. C., & Mauborgne, R. (2005). *Blue ocean strategy: How to create uncontested market space and make competition irrelevant*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- King, S. (1991). Brand building in the 1990s. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 8(4), 43–52.

- Kleinaltenkamp, M. (2010). Is marketing academia losing its way? – A commentary from a German perspective. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 18(3), 171–173.
- Knox, S. (2004). Positioning and branding your organisation. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 13(2), 105–115.
- Knox, S., & Bickerton, D. (2003). The six conventions of corporate branding. *European Journal of Marketing*, 37(7/8), 998–1016.
- Kohli, A. K., & Jaworski, B. (1990). Market orientation: The construct, research propositions, and managerial implications. *Journal of Marketing*, 54(1), 1–18.
- Kornberger, M. (2010). *Brand society: How brands transform management and lifestyle*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Kotler, P., & Pfoertsch, W. (2006). *B2B brand management*. Berlin: Springer.
- Kotler, P., Keller, K. L., Brady, M., Goodman, M., & Hansen, T. (2009). *Marketing management*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.
- Kotter, J. P. (1995). Leading change: Why transformations efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review*, 73(2), 59–67.
- Lambkin, M. C., & Muzellec, L. (2010). Leveraging brand equity in business-to-business mergers and acquisitions. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39(8), 1234–1239.
- Langley, A. (1999). Strategies for theorizing from process data. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(4), 691–710.
- Langley, A. (2011). Studying processes in and around organizations. In D. Buchanan, & A. Bryman (Eds.). *The sage handbook of organizational research methods* (pp. 409–429). London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Latour, B. (1986). Visualization and cognition. *Knowledge and Society*, 6, 1–40.
- Leavy, B. (2003). Assessing your strategic alternatives from both a market position and core competence perspective. *Strategy & Leadership*, 31(6), 29–35.
- Lee, Z. (2013). Rebranding in brand-oriented organisations: Exploring tensions in the nonprofit sector. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(9/10), 1124–1142.
- Leek, S., & Christodoulides, G. (2011). A literature review and future agenda for B2B branding: Challenges of branding in a B2B context. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(6), 830–837.

- Lencioni, P. K. (2002). Make your values mean something. *Harvard Business Review*, 80(7), 113–117.
- Leonard-Barton, D. (1990). A dual methodology for case studies: Synergistic use of a longitudinal single site with replicated multiple sites. *Organization Science*, 1(3), 248–266.
- Lindgreen, A., Beverland, M., & Farrelly, F. (2010). From strategy to tactics: Building, implementing, and managing brand equity in business markets. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39(8), 1223–1225.
- Louro, M. J., & Cunha, P. V. (2001). Brand management paradigms. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 17(7/8), 849–875.
- Low, G. S., & Fullerton, R. A. (1994). Brands, brand management, and the brand manager system: a critical-historical evaluation. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 31(2), 173–190.
- MacInnis, D. J. (2011). A framework for conceptual contributions in marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 75(4), 136–154.
- March, J. G. (1962). The business firm as a political coalition. *Journal of Politics*, 24(4), 662–678.
- Marconomy. (2013). *Mission black box*. Retrieved May 30, 2013, from files.vogel.de/vogelonline/vogelonline/issues/epaperarchiv/marconomy\_0313/index.html#/46/
- Marketing Week. (2011). *B2B brands build extra marketing muscle*. Retrieved September 18, 2014, from <http://www.marketingweek.co.uk/analysis/essential-reads/b2b-brands-build-extra-marketing-muscle/3029899.article>
- MarketLine. (2011). *Holmen AB: Company profile*. Retrieved from Business Source Complete.
- Marsden, P. (2002). Brand positioning: Meme's the word. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 20(5), 307–312.
- Martin, J. A., & Eisenhardt, K. M. (2010). Rewiring: Cross-business-unit collaborations in multibusiness organizations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53(2), 265–301.
- McCracken, G. (1988). *The long interview: Qualitative research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- McQuiston, D. H. (2004). Successful branding of a commodity product: The case of RAEX LASER steel. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 33(4), 345–354.



- Melewar, T., Gotsi, M., & Andriopoulos, C. (2012). Shaping the research agenda for corporate branding: Avenues for future research. *European Journal of Marketing*, 46(5), 600–608.
- Merrilees, B. (2005). Radical brand evolution: A case-based framework. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 45(2), 201–210.
- Merrilees, B., & Miller, D. (2008). Principles of corporate rebranding. *European Journal of Marketing*, 42(5/6), 537–552.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Miller, D., Merrilees, B., & Yakimova, R. (2014). Corporate rebranding: An integrative review of major enablers and barriers to the rebranding process. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 16(3), 265–289.
- Millward Brown. (2014). *BrandZ Top 100 – Most valuable global brands report*. Retrieved September 18, 2014, from <http://www.millwardbrown.com/mb-global/brand-strategy/brand-equity/brandz/top-global-brands/brand-categories/technology/business>
- Mintzberg, H. (1978). Patterns in strategy formation. *Management Science*, 24(9), 934–948.
- Mintzberg, H., & Waters, J. A. (1985). Of strategies, deliberate and emergent. *Strategic Management Journal*, 6(3), 257–272.
- Mintzberg, H., Ahlstrand, B., & Lampel, J. (2009). *Strategy safari* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Harlow, UK: FT Prentice Hall.
- Morgan, G. (2006). *Images of Organization*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mudambi, S., Doyle, P., & Wong, V. (1997). An exploration of branding in industrial markets. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 26(5), 433–446.
- Mühlbacher, H., Dreher, A., & Gabriel-Ritter, A. (1994). MIPS – Managing industrial positioning strategies. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 23(4), 287–297.
- Muzellec, L., & Lambkin, M. C. (2006). Corporate rebranding: Destroying, transferring or creating brand equity? *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(7/8), 803–824.
- Muzellec, L., & Lambkin, M. C. (2009). Corporate branding and brand architecture: A conceptual framework. *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), 39–54.
- Narver, J. C., & Slater, S. F. (1990). The effect of a market orientation on business profitability. *Journal of Marketing*, 54(4), 20–35.

- Nayak, A. (2008). On the way to theory: A processual approach. *Organization Studies*, 29(2), 173–190.
- Opticom. (2010). *The most valuable cartonboard brands*. Retrieved September 6, 2013, from <http://www.opticom.se/the-most-valuable-cartonboard-brands-ranked-by-opticom-converters/>
- Park, C. W., Jaworski, B., & MacInnis, D. J. (1986). Strategic brand concept-image management. *Journal of Marketing*, 50(4), 135–145.
- Paroutis, S., & Pettigrew, A. M. (2007). Strategizing in the multi-business firm: Strategy teams at multiple levels and over time. *Human Relations*, 60(1), 99–135.
- Pechmann, C., & Ratneshwar, S. (1991). The use of comparative advertising for brand positioning: Association versus differentiation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 18(2), 145–160.
- Pettigrew, A. M. (1985). *The awakening giant: Continuity and change in Imperial Chemical Industries*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Pettigrew, A. M. (1987). Context and action in the transformation of the firm. *Journal of Management Studies*, 24(6), 649–670.
- Pettigrew, A. M. (1990). Longitudinal field research on change: Theory and practice. *Organization Science*, 1(3), 267–292.
- Pettigrew, A. M. (1992). The character and significance of strategy process research. *Strategic Management Journal*, 13(2), 5–16.
- Pettigrew, A. M. (1997). What is a processual analysis? *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 13(4), 337–348.
- Pettigrew, A. M. (2012). Context and action in the transformation of the firm: A reprise. *Journal of Management Studies*, 49(7), 1304–1328.
- Pettigrew, A. M., Woodman, R. W., & Cameron, K. S. (2001). Studying organizational change and development: Challenges for future research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(4), 697–713.
- Pham, M. T., & Muthukrishnan, A. V. (2002). Search and alignment in judgment revision: Implications for brand positioning. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39(1), 18–30.
- Pollay, R. W. (1985). The subsiding sizzle: A descriptive history of print advertising, 1900–1980. *Journal of Marketing*, 49(3), 24–37.
- Porter, M. E. (1980). *Competitive strategy: Techniques for analyzing industries and competitors*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

- Porter, M. E. (1985). *Competitive advantage: Creating and sustaining superior performance*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Porter, M. E. (1996). What is strategy? *Harvard Business Review*, 74(6), 61–78.
- PR Week Awards. (2010). *Rebranding IBM for a smarter planet and a broader audience*. Retrieved September 18, 2014, from <http://awards.prweekus.com/rebranding-ibm-smarter-planet-and-broader-audience>
- Prahalad, C. K., & Hamel, G. (1990). The core competence of the corporation. *Harvard Business Review*, 68(3), 79–91.
- Punj, G., & Moon, J. (2002). Positioning options for achieving brand association: A psychological categorization framework. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(4), 275–283.
- Raggio, R. D., & Leone, R. P. (2007). The theoretical separation of brand equity and brand value: Managerial implications for strategic planning. *Journal of Brand Management*, 14(5), 380–395.
- Reed, M. (2005). Reflections on the ‘realist turn’ in organization and management studies. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(8), 1621–1644.
- Reid, M., Luxton, S., & Mavondo, F. (2005). The relationship between integrated marketing communication, market orientation, and brand orientation. *Journal of Advertising*, 34(4), 11–23.
- Rescher, N. (1996). *Process metaphysics: An introduction to process philosophy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Ries, A., & Trout, J. (1986). *Positioning: The battle for your mind*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Ries, A., & Trout, J. (2001). *Positioning: The battle for your mind – The 20th anniversary edition*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Roper, S., & Fill, C. (2012). *Corporate reputation: Brand and communication*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.
- Rossiter, J. R., & Percy, L. (1997). *Advertising, communications and promotion management* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Riezebos, R., & van der Grinten, J. (2012). *Positioning the brand: An inside-out approach to strategic brand positioning*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Sattler, H., & Völckner, F. (2007). *Markenpolitik* [Branding policy] (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

- Sawhney, M. S. (1998). Leveraged high-variety strategies: From portfolio thinking to platform thinking. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 26(1), 54–61.
- Sayer, A. (1992). *Method in social science: A realist approach* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London, UK: Routledge.
- Sayer, A. (2000). *Realism and social science*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Schatzki, T. R. (2005). Peripheral vision: The sites of organizations. *Organization Studies*, 26(3), 465–484.
- Schein, E. (2010). *Organizational culture and leadership* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schultz, M. (2005). Corporate branding as organizational change. In M. Schultz, Y. M. Antorini, & F. F. Csaba, F. F. (Eds.), *Corporate branding: Purpose/people/process*. (pp. 181–216). Køge: Copenhagen Business School Press.
- Schultz, M., & de Chernatony, L. (2002). The challenges of corporate branding. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 5(2/3), 105–113.
- Schultz, M., & Hatch, M. J. (2003). The cycles of corporate branding. *California Management Review*, 46(1), 6–26.
- Schultz, M., Antorini, Y. M., & Csaba, F. F. (2005). Corporate branding – An evolving concept. In M. Schultz, Y. M. Antorini, & F. F. Csaba, F. F. (Eds.), *Corporate branding: Purpose/people/process*. (pp. 9–20). Køge: Copenhagen Business School Press.
- Shapiro, B. P. (1988). What the hell is ‘market oriented’? *Harvard Business Review*, 66(6), 119–25.
- Silverman, D. (2010). *Doing qualitative research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Silverman, D. (2011). *Interpreting qualitative data* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Slater, S. F. (1997). Developing a customer value-based theory of the firm. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 25(2), 162–167.
- Sminia, H. (2009). Process research in strategy formation: Theory, methodology and relevance. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 11(1), 97–125.
- Smith, R. W., & Lusch, R. F. (1976). How advertising can position a brand. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 16(1), 37–43.

- Sonenshein, S. (2010). We're changing—Or are we? Untangling the role of progressive, regressive, and stability narratives during strategic change implementation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53(3), 477–512.
- Spee, A. P., & Jarzabkowski, P. (2011). Strategic planning as communicative process. *Organization Studies*, 32(9), 1217–1245.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Stark, D. (2011). *The sense of dissonance: Accounts of worth in economic life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Stern, B. B. (2006). What does brand mean? Historical-analysis method and construct definition. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 34(2), 216–223.
- Styhre, A. (2002). How process philosophy can contribute to strategic management. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 19(6), 577–587.
- Stuart, H. J. (2013). Positioning the corporate brand as sustainable: Leadership *de rigueur*. *Journal of Brand Management*, 20(9), 793–799.
- Stålhammar, M. (1997). *Metaforernas mönster [Patterns of metaphor]*. Stockholm: Carlssons Bokförlag.
- Sujan, M., & Bettman, J. R. (1989). The effects of brand positioning strategies on consumers' brand and category perceptions: Some insights from schema research. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 26(4), 454–467.
- Taylor, W. (1991). The logic of global business: An interview with ABB's Percy Barnevik. *Harvard Business Review*, 69(2), 90–105.
- Teece, D. J., Pisano, G., & Shuen, A. (1997). Dynamic capabilities and strategic management, *Strategic Management Journal*, 18(7), 509–533.
- Thomas, G. (2011). *How to do your case study: A guide for students and researchers*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Trelleborg AB. (2013). *Trelleborg annual report 2012*. Retrieved March 20, 2013, from <http://www.trelleborg.com/en/Investors/Reports/Latest-Reports/?iid=1276275>
- Tsoukas, H. (1991). The missing link: A transformational view of metaphors in organizational science. *Academy of Management Review*, 16(3), 566–585.
- Tsoukas, H., & Chia, R. (2002). On organizational becoming: Rethinking organizational change. *Organization Science*, 13(5), 567–582.

- Urde, M. (1999). Brand orientation: A mindset for building brands into strategic resources. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 15(1–3), 117–133.
- Urde, M. (2003). Core value-based corporate brand building. *European Journal of Marketing*, 37(7/8), 1017–1040.
- Urde, M. (2009). Uncovering the corporate brand's core values. *Management Decision*, 47(4), 616–638.
- Urde, M. (2013). The corporate brand identity matrix. *Journal of Brand Management*, 20(9), 742–761.
- Urde, M., & Koch, C. (forthcoming). Market- and brand-oriented schools of positioning. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*.
- Urde, M., Baumgarth, C., & Merrilees, B. (2011). Brand orientation and market orientation – From alternatives to synergy. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 13–20.
- Urde, M., Greyser, S. A., & Balmer, J. M. T. (2007). Corporate brands with a heritage. *Journal of Brand Management*, 15(1), 4–19.
- Vallaster, C., & de Chernatony, L. (2006). Internal brand building and structuration: The role of leadership. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(7/8), 761–784.
- Vallaster, C., & Lindgreen, A. (2011). Corporate brand strategy formation: Brand actors and the situational context for a business-to-business brand. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(7), 1133–1143.
- Van de Ven, A. H. (1992). Suggestions for studying strategy process: A research note. *Strategic Management Journal*, 13(5), 169–188.
- Van de Ven, A. H. (2007). *Engaged scholarship: A guide for organizational and social research*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Van de Ven, A. H., & Poole, M. S. (1990). Methods for studying innovation development in the Minnesota Innovation Research Program. *Organization Science*, 1(3), 313–335.
- Van de Ven, A. H., & Poole, M. S. (1995). Explaining development and change in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 510–540.
- Van Riel, C. B., & Balmer, J. M. T. (1997). Corporate identity: The concept, its measurement and management. *European Journal of Marketing*, 31(5/6), 340–355.

- Venkatesan, R., & Kumar, V.A. (2004). Customer lifetime value framework for customer selection and resource allocation strategy. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(4), 106–25.
- Wallace, E., Buil, I., & de Chernatony, L. (2013). Brand orientation and brand values in retail banking. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(9/10), 1007–1029.
- Wallström, Å., Karlsson, T., & Salehi-Sangari, E. (2008). Building a corporate brand: The internal brand building process in Swedish service firms. *Journal of Brand Management*, 16(1), 40–50.
- Ward, S., Goldstine, J., & Light, L. (1999). What high-tech managers need to know about brands. *Harvard Business Review*, 77(4), 85–95.
- Webster, F. E., & Keller, K. L. (2004). A roadmap for branding in industrial markets. *Journal of Brand Management*, 11(5), 388–402.
- Weick, K. E. (1989). Theory construction as disciplined imagination. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 516–531.
- Weick, K. E., & Quinn, R. E. (1999). Organizational change and development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50, 361–386.
- Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science*, 16(4), 409–421.
- Wind, Y. (1982). *Product policy: Concepts, methods and strategy*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Wind, Y. (1990). Positioning analysis and strategy. In G. Day, B. Weitz, & R. Wensley (Eds.), *The Interface of Marketing Strategy* (pp. 387–412). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Whittington, R. (1996). Strategy as practice. *Long Range Planning*, 29(5), 731–735.
- Whittington, R. (2007). Strategy practice and strategy process: Family differences and the sociological eye. *Organization Studies*, 28(10), 1575–1586.
- Wong, H. Y., & Merrilees, B. (2007). Closing the marketing strategy to performance gap: The role of brand orientation. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 15(5), 387–402.
- Yakimova, R., & Beverland, M. (2005). The brand-supportive firm: An exploration of organisational drivers of brand updating. *Journal of Brand Management*, 12(6), 445–460.

- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Zednik, A., & Strebinger, A. (2008). Brand management models of major consulting firms, advertising agencies and market research companies: A categorisation and positioning analysis of models offered in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. *Journal of Brand Management*, 15(5), 301–311.









**Christian H. Koch** is a researcher in strategic brand management at the Department of Business Administration, School of Economics and Management, Lund University, Sweden. He is a founding member of the Lund Brand Management Group (LBMG) research unit. His research interests include brand positioning, corporate branding, brand identity, and organizational change. He has presented his research to academic and practitioner audiences at conferences in Germany, Sweden, and the UK.

## Corporate Brand Positioning

Positioning is a key concept in the fields of branding, marketing, and strategy. In brand management, positioning deals fundamentally with finding a balance between sameness and differentiation. Empirical research predominantly examines the effectiveness of certain strategies. Less is known about the management process and internal brand positioning dynamics. Furthermore, positioning research still needs to be developed in a comprehensive corporate branding context, due to its recent elevated importance for organizations. This thesis remediates these limitations by identifying corporate brand positioning as a strategic development process, which is aware of activity, time, and context. This is important for refining the corporate brand positioning concept.

Based on qualitative case studies within industrial multi-business firms ABB (power and automation industry), Trelleborg (polymer engineering industry), and Holmen (pulp and paper industry), this study opens the proverbial black box to reveal how corporate brand positioning occurs over time. The findings are conceptualized across five dimensions: where and when positioning occurs (that is, location and timing), why it occurs (that is, driver patterns), what occurs (that is, activities, choices, and challenges), and who is involved (that is, actors and their roles).

Findings suggest understanding corporate brand positioning as strategic episodes that develop between managerial agency and institutional or environmental constraints. Positioning is found to be a recurring, multi-level process, making it more than just a corporate-level marketing activity. This thesis uncovers three broad driver patterns and their reactive and proactive nature. Positioning episodes are found to pass through seven stages, each creating enablers and barriers for change. Corporate brand positioning is in fact a political process that needs to be carefully coordinated between five key practitioner groups. It also needs to be integrated across stable firm levels as well as a temporary level that consists of micro-episodes of reflective strategic practice. This thesis develops a nuanced perspective on positioning and demarcates it from continuous brand management activities. Finally, this study also provides corporate- and business-level managers with role-relevant implications to be better prepared when assigned to positioning change episodes.