

The relevance and role of branding in project activities

WORK – IN – PROGRESS

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Key words: project marketing, brand, branding process, customer satisfaction, internal role of brands

Abstract

Branding theory has been largely developed in the context of consumer products where it found its origin. Traditionally, the brand is presented as a market signal mostly targeted to the end consumers and enabling them to save time by guaranteeing a certain level of quality, simplifying their choices (easily identifying products and attributes); and answering to specific needs – hedonistic, ethical, or individual (Kapferer, 1992 [2004]). The brand enables the producer to position its offering relative to competition and to emphasize its distinctive qualities and benefits for the consumers. More recently, the brand also has been found to have a federating power (Dacin & Brown, 2006; Handelman, 2006) between individual customers (Arvidsson, 2005).

Little research has been done to investigate the relevance and the role of brands in industrial markets and in particular in project business. Some authors have started to emphasize the importance of branding in industrial markets (Webster & Keller, 2004; Lynch & de Chernatony, 2004) but their contributions do not address the case of project exchanges.

Project activities are characterized by the discontinuity of transactions (low frequency of purchase), complexity (involvement of numerous business and non business actors), and uniqueness (Cova, Ghauri & Salle, 2002). As a result, there is no repeated purchase and no pre-determined product or offering as each project is specifically designed for a given customer. Thus the traditional role of brands as a signal summarizing the benefits of a product with relatively stable attributes (Kapferer, 1992 [2004]) does not apply. Consequently, very few project firms have relied on product brands to promote their activities thus far and their branding strategies has been mostly restricted to their corporate brands.

The objective of this paper is to examine the relevance and the role of branding in project business. It is based on an in-depth case study of a major construction contractor, which decided to develop a branding strategy to promote its project activities in the early 2000s. Three brands dedicated to three different types of project activities have been developed over time. In this case, the brand essence is the contractor's processes formalized in a set of contractor's commitments.

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Introduction

The business-to-business marketing literature has initially focused on economic exchanges of products and services leading to repetitive transactions between a buying and a selling organisation. In particular, the original frameworks developed by the IMP School of Thought led to the development of the Interaction model (Håkansson, 1982) and to the Market as Network Approach and emphasize the long-term perspectives of economic exchanges between professional organisations (Axellson & Easton, 1992; Håkansson & Snehota, 1995). In this conceptual framework, buying and selling in industrial markets cannot be understood as a series of disembodied and serially independent transactions. Instead, transactions can only be examined as episodes in often long-standing and complex relationships between the buying and selling organisation (see in particular Easton & Araujo, 1992).

On the other hand, project transactions are often characterized by a lack of bonding, dependence and mutual orientation between actors beyond a single project (Skaates, Tikkanen & Lindblom, 2002). This is due to the specificities of project activities: 1) the discontinuity of relationships between buyers and sellers due to the low frequency of purchase (Hadjikhani, 1996; Seshadri & Mishra, 2004), 2) their complexity linked to the involvement of numerous business and non-business actors (Cova & Salle, 2005), and 3) their uniqueness (Cova, Ghauri & Salle, 2002). As a result, there is no repeated purchase and no pre-determined product or offering as each project is specifically designed for a given customer¹. This situation generates a high level of uncertainty for the parties (Turner & Simister, 2001; Barlow & Jashapara, 1998; Cova, Ghauri & Salle, 2002; Smyth, 2000). According to Turner and Simister (2001), this uncertainty is related to the project's process (the process does not deliver the product as designed), to its product (the product as designed does not meet the client's needs) or to its purpose (the project no longer meets the objectives set due to changing market conditions for example).

Hence, a customer will try to reduce the perceived uncertainty related to its project purchase through various means (Michel et al, 2003). The relevance of the concept of uncertainty to analyse the customer's purchasing behaviour has already been shown both by business-to business marketing scholars (Håkansson, Johanson & Wootz, 1976; Håkansson & Wootz, 1975) and by institutional economics (Williamson, 1985; North, 1996). Uncertainty refers to the incapacity of agents, who are faced with an array of possible contingencies, to imagine the characteristics of the future. *"Economic agents do not know the solutions to the problems they face, are unable to calculate the possible outcomes of these solutions, and cannot perfectly arrange these outcomes in terms of preferences"* (Brousseau & Fares, 2000: 10). It mainly results from the behaviour of the individuals involved in the transaction but also from the objective conditions of the exchange. The higher the perceived uncertainty, the higher will be the transaction costs related to that exchange. In the field of projects, the choice of a contract design by a customer thus reflects the need to achieve goal alignment and avoid opportunistic behaviour between the client and the contractor (Turner & Simister, 2001).

In the marketing literature, the brand is often presented as a means to reduce the customer's perceived uncertainty related to a product or service purchase. Traditionally, the brand is presented as a market signal mostly targeted to the customers and enabling them to save time by guaranteeing a certain level of quality, simplifying their choices (easily identifying products and attributes); and answering to specific needs – hedonistic, ethical, or individual (Kapferer & Laurent 1992). The stability and consistency of this market signal carried by the brand reduces the customer's uncertainty.

In this context, it could be argued that the usage of a brand would be particularly appropriate to label project activities as they are characterized by a high level of purchase uncertainty. However, the use

¹ Turner and Müller (2003: 2) define a project as a *"temporary organization to which resources are assigned to undertake a unique, novel, and transient endeavour managing the inherent uncertainty and need for integration in order to deliver beneficial objectives of change."*

of brands in project activities seems very limited and often restricted to corporate brands. Several reasons can be identified. Firstly, the uniqueness of each project transaction (no repeated purchase) prevents project suppliers to package their offer in the form of standardized products and services (Mattsson, 1973; Ghauri, 1983). It seems therefore more difficult to associate the brand to stable product attributes generating specific benefits for the consumers, which is the main objective of a brand. Secondly, this may also relate to the more recent development of the marketing orientation in firms selling projects as compared to firms selling standardized goods.

Little research has been done to investigate the relevance and the role of brands in industrial markets and in particular in project business. Some authors have started to emphasize the importance of branding in industrial markets (Webster & Keller, 2004; Lynch & de Chernatony, 2004) but their contributions do not address the case of project exchanges.

We feel that this paper can contribute to enrich the IMP research as it focuses on better understanding the dynamics of supplier-customer relationships in industrial networks by focusing on one the specific issue related to the management of transactions involving high uncertainty

The objective of this paper is to examine the relevance and the role of branding in project business, as a means to reduce uncertainty in the customer-supplier relationship and in the network of actors involved in project negotiations. It is based on an in-depth case study of a major French construction contractor –Spie batignolles-, which decided to develop a branding strategy to promote its project activities in the early 2000s. The construction industry is interesting as it represents a typical ‘project-based activity’ (Cox & Thompson, 1997). Moreover, this sector is also characterized by the predominance of opportunistic and adversarial behaviours between parties (Sai On et al., 2003), lack of trust, and often sub-optimal performance in terms of project cost, duration and quality (March & Simon, 1993; Cain, 2004). Customer-supplier relationships are generally conducted at arms-length rather than being partnerships and “*firms generally pay little attention to the relational elements of business transactions*” (Thompson, Cox & Anderson, 1998: 36). All these factors increase the level of perceived uncertainty for the project customers in the construction industry (Crespin-Mazet, 2007). In such activities, brands are usually less developed than in other fields because contracts are based on the specificities of each project.

The branding strategy developed by this French contractor to label its various project activities thus seems to represent an exception in the construction industry (at least in France). Spie batignolles actually developed two sub-brands (beyond its corporate brand) to label its different project activities since 2000 and in the process of launching a third one, while none of its major competitors have done so.

From an institutional point of view (Azimont & Araujo, 2007; Beverland, 2005), actors belonging to the same competitive field are expected to develop similar -if not identical- strategies (Anand & Peterson, 2000; Fligstein, 1996; Fourcade, 2007). The choice of Spie batignolles to develop a branding strategy thus cannot be explained by the classical theoretical frameworks. We can therefore consider that the case of Spie batignolles and its branding strategy constitutes a “*critical case*” in the sense of Yin (1984).

Following the principles of *grounded theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 (1999)), we will therefore articulate this paper around this “critical case” data. The first part is dedicated to the presentation of the methodology used. We then present the emerging research questions. The third part is devoted to the case study highlighting the reasons for the development of a branding strategy by the contractor, the main characteristics of each brand developed, the method used to develop and promote each brand and finally the impact of this branding strategy on the customer’s behaviour (perception of the benefits). The fourth part is dedicated to a discussion of the results obtained. Finally, we propose several perspectives for further research.

I. METHODOLOGY

Traditionally research on branding is based on hypothetical approaches in line with the classical principles advocated by the marketing management philosophy (Cochoy, 1999). Recently, new strands of researches in this field have employed empirically driven researches (Holt, 2002) in order to discover new elements of brand management. Following this trend, this research takes fieldwork as the conceptual/theoretical point of departure.

We used a qualitative method based on a longitudinal and extended case study (Burawoy, 1979). This came across as appropriate for several reasons: (1) It enables to obtain detailed descriptions of the process when a holistic perspective is required (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The development of the branding strategy actually spread over 8 years (from 2000 to 2008) requiring a holistic perspective; (2) Since the results of the first brand launch impacted the way the others brands have been launched, we needed to understand and analyse the interaction between complex, technical and social processes and to “preserve chronological flows” (Ghuri & Grønhaug, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990); (3) It is adapted to exploratory research designs in the analysis of business exchanges (Yin 1984 (2003); Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005).

One of the two authors was deeply involved both as an academic and as a consultant with the construction company. This close cooperation gave us access to a considerable and very rich amount of information on the development of this branding strategy and to observe its evolution from “inside”.

The data has been collected through various sources of evidence to ensure maximum reliability and validity of our case study (Burawoy, 1979; Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1984): personal interviews, archival records, and various sources of documentary information both internal and external to Spie Batignolles (see appendix 1). All of these sources were integrated in the case study.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The themes that emerged from our data suggest that the decision to create sub-brands was specific to Spie batignolles and was not a common practice of the other construction contractors. Thus, the research process focused on the reasons explaining this non-conformation of a challenger (Spie batignolles is ranked 4 among the French construction industry) to the dominant logic prevailing in the sector (Prahalad & Bettis, 1986)².

This research work thus focuses on understanding the reasons and the logic that drove the contractor to develop a branding strategy and its impact on the marketplace. A first possible explanation could be based on the contractor’s position of challenger in the industry. In spite of its interest, this reason is not fully grounded by our case data and cannot solely justify the branding strategy.

III. CASE STUDY

With 8000 people, SB’s turnover reached € 1.5 billion in 2007. Its main target markets are industry, environment, underground works (subways, tunnels), distribution outlets, office buildings, housing, public works, structure and tourist infrastructures both for public and private clients.

3.1. The history of brand development in Spie batignolles

Up until the early 1990s’, Spie batignolles and its competitors were adopting the usual, classical approach characterizing the French construction industry (Guillou, Crespín-Mazet, & Salle, 2003). Several factors led Spie batignolles to progressively change its market approach:

² Prahalad and Bettis (1986: 485) define the dominant logic as “*the mental maps developed through experience in the core business and sometimes applied inappropriately in other business*”.

- A decrease in the number of public projects (which represented 80% of Spie Batignolles' turnover in 1997) as well as the mid 90s crisis which increased competitive pressure, pushed prices down and generated a reduction of profit margin.
- The decision of the Schneider group (a diversified French group in which Spie batignolles was a subsidiary) to divest Spie batignolles in 97 so as to focus on its core business. The company was then taken over by its employees and by the British Group AMEC SA.

This new context increased the pressure on profitability and pushed Spie batignolles to guarantee its stakeholders a positive margin, a more predictable profitability as well as a reduction of the risks and uncertainties of its activities. Given all these constraints, a new strategy was developed along four lines:

1. Select most attractive market segments according to the corporate goals. Priority customers are defined as those generating the least financial risks and with whom it is possible to generate repeat business.
2. Develop a proactive offer strategy to be able to conquer new and more profitable customers, especially in the private sector. The new leitmotiv of the company then becomes "**create and share value with our customers**". As pointed out by the managing director: *"I remember precisely this board of directors' meeting in which we were debating about the future of our company. It was in 1997 in a dark period of recession for the industry. An idea emerged, that was both simple and very ambitious and that became the basis of our new strategy: create and share value with our customer". Since then, this idea has guided all our choices and given a meaning to all our actions. It has been materialized by the creation of our brands*".
3. Formalize "their market offer" to be more proactive towards the market and avoid being only in a reactive position to competitive bids
4. Segment the market to identify the customers that are in coherence with this strategy and develop a targeted sales action.

This strategy started with the development of a first new offer formalizing the company's approach to carry out Design & Build projects. This methodology was initially inspired by the experience of their British shareholder AMEC SA, which had successfully developed an « Alliancing » strategy for engineering projects. Such a partnering approach was coherent with Spie batignolles' willingness to develop a true customer orientation.

Based on this experience, Spie batignolles developed a specific partnerial approach. It also decided to give it a specific name so that people could recognize its specificities. It has been baptised "Concertance®" (see Exhibit 1). As mentioned by the managing director: *"We wanted to give it a name to help crystallize its meaning, and send a message that it was something different and specific. At that time, lots of people were beginning to call it "alliance" internally but what we had developed, was very different from what AMEC had developed. It was specific to construction projects. We were concerned that people would not see the difference. We wanted to show a clear difference from existing practices, in particular, those of some competitors..."*

For fear of being imitated by their powerful competitors and even stolen the name, they protected the label and decided to brand it. At that time, the branding strategy was not formalized. The main objective is to label the approach, differentiate it and protect it.

The Concertance® brand and methodology

The main idea is to interact very early with the customer as soon as its projects arises in order to commonly develop the project specifications and then realize its construction ("Design & Build approach"). This type of approach differs from traditional approaches where the customer first

defines its specifications alone or with the support of an architect, and then publishes a call for tender for the construction of its project.

It is based on three key elements:

- the early creation of a project group including all parties concerned (the customer, the main contractor, the architect, a quantity surveyor, key subcontractors),
- the preliminary development of a detailed feasibility study (invoiced to the customer) aimed at identifying the priority functions of the customer's project, value them so as to define the specifications that are most appropriate to the functional needs and financial constraints of the customer.
- costs transparency (cost + fee approach: the main contractor's profit margin is set at the beginning) and development of a trust atmosphere between actors.

Exhibit 1. Key attributes of the Concertance® brand

From 2001 onwards, Spie batignolles starts being increasingly selective in its projects choices. It is awarded several projects based on this partnership approach ("Concertance"), while continuing to win projects in the traditional scheme. The satisfaction survey carried out by the firm on its projects activities revealed the following points:

- A higher satisfaction rate for the Concertance® projects (100%) than for the projects carried out in the traditional approach (85%) particularly concerning the attitude of the teams involved, their attention to customer needs, and their commitment.
- Less claims.
- The Concertance® approach is identified as different and bringing a competitive advantage that Spie batignolles does not have on its traditional activities for which it is characterized as doing the same as the others.
- The customers do not identify the brand as bringing some added value. The customers stress more the approach, the method and the efforts developed by the teams to be committed to the success of the project and ensuring the complete customer satisfaction.
- In these surveys, the brand awareness remains low (only 27% of the Concertance® customers declare knowing the name of the brand in 2003; and 17% of Spie batignolles' total number customers). Some salespeople admit that they do not systematically mention the name of the brand to their customers but attach more importance to explaining its benefits for the customers. For them, Concertance® is firstly an offer and not a brand. And for them, selling an offer in a proactive way already corresponds to a drastic change of habits!

The success of these first projects is largely communicated internally and the pioneering teams who accepted to promote it were given a lot of positive press internally from top management. They are formally invited to share their experience in the annual global conventions, to help train the other teams; the internal newsletter and magazines congratulate their efforts and success ... Later, these early Concertance® champions obtained key managing positions as heads of key subsidiaries or business units when the group was restructured... For once, salespeople obtained key managing positions in a company and sector characterized by its technical-orientation.

This internal ladder of prestige started to have some impact among the employees in charge of other activities who felt that they were not given the same means and resources to promote their activities, and to be internally recognized for their value-added. In particular, the teams in charge of promoting small projects like renovation, small civil engineering projects or maintenance and extension jobs claimed that they were also contributing to reaching the corporate goals for three main reasons: 1) these activities are less risky than large projects; 2) they are usually more profitable (unit margin); 3) they generate more continuous business with a given customer. This drew the attention of top management who was in the process of developing its next 5 years strategic plan.

At the beginning of 2002, the company prepares its future LBO (Leverage Buy Out). The shares hold by AMEC and by the employees were to be sold to the 78 major executives and to a private investor (Barclays Private Equity France). A major consulting firm carried out a complete audit of the company and formally acknowledged the value of the brand Concertance®. The managing directors then realized for the first time that a brand could increase the value of their firm. The consulting company also highlighted the relevance to develop renovation and maintenance activities.

The directors decided to develop a second brand for this activity. They formally recognized the value of marketing in their business: they hired a Marketing Director, and created a Development and Marketing Department in the company. At this stage, the company had clearly formulated its intent to base its marketing strategy on a “true branding strategy”. One year after in 2003, the new offer called Presance® (see Exhibit 2) is launched by the company in an exceptionally prestigious internal Convention. The two existing brands are given a special logotype and visual identity. The Marketing Department is structured around one Marketing Director and two “Product Managers: one for Concertance® and one for Presance®.

The Presance® brand in 2003

The promise: « the maintenance solutions of Spie batignolles »

7 commitments:

- a unique and permanent point of contact
- a complete availability 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- the strict respect of your norms in terms of quality, security and environment
- guaranteed delays of execution
- a sales proposal submitted in 48h
- the full mastery of your costs
- the coordination of fully involved and selected partners.

Exhibit 2. Key attributes of the Presance® brand

This time, the internal teams in charge of Presance® immediately adopt the brand and start asking for brochures, and any other tangible supports that can reveal its identity and communicate it both internally and externally (T-shirts, helmets, stickers). This rapid mobilisation and positive reaction to the brand was a real surprise for the managing directors who had not experienced that with Concertance®.

This was all the more surprising that the offer had been developed very rapidly, based on the best practices identified on existing contracts and without the formal involvement of the teams concerned, nor any preliminary test. Two years after, the satisfaction survey carried out on the Presance® brand both externally and internally revealed the following points:

Concerning the customers:

- the brand awareness is high: 4 customers out of 5 recognized the brand,
- the satisfaction rate is high: 94%,
- but the attributes of the brand (content of the offer) remain largely unknown: only 8% of the customers can quote of its commitments; and only 42% of the customers can explain the specificities of the brand as compared to its competitors. The differentiating factor is thus much lower than for Concertance®,
- some attributes are not valued by the customers, and do not correspond to any specific needs or expectations (the availability 24 hours day, 7 days a week only appeals to a small segment (niche); the coordination of partners is not valued as such).

Concerning the Presance® teams, they express their strong attachment to the brand even though they recognize that its attributes are not always relevant and that they very seldom detail them to the customers.

IV. ANALYSIS

As mentioned before, the construction industry is characterized by the predominance of opportunistic behaviours (Thompson et al. 1998; Cain, 2004; Sai On et al., 2003; Dubois & Gadde, 2000). In terms of branding strategies, such a context usually favours the reliance on strong corporate brands. The corporate brand then acts as the main « guarantee » for the customer and each contract is negotiated independently and customized to meet the specificities of the customer's needs.

The contractor studied - Spie batignolles - developed a different strategy through the development of two sub-brands to label its different fields of activities. The satisfaction levels generated by these two sub-brands are relatively high. However, the case study reveals some contrasting situations concerning the brand awareness and the perception of their attributes and benefits for the customer. In other words, even when the brand is known, its image remains blurred and its promise uncertain for the consumers.

In the case of the Concertance® brand, the customer satisfaction seems to be explained mostly by the content of the offer, its process and the proactive strategy developed by the contractor to precisely understand its needs and constraints so as to develop the optimal project and provide the "required value" (avoid risks of under-quality but also of providing an unnecessary and costly quality). The brand as such (the name or label Concertance®), is not acknowledged as part of the global offer by the customers. Thus it is not valued for its own sake. The differentiating factor of Concertance® mostly comes from the attributes of the "product". This can be explained by several factors: (1) the lack of familiarity of the teams with the marketing approach; (2) the recent launch of the brand in the group; (3) but more probably the complexity of the projects targeted by the Concertance® methodology. Hence, the customer faced with a lot of uncertainties and risks needs to be reinsured by more than the brand and promises, but needs to verify on the site that the claims are actually implemented. This is all the more important in a context of adversarial relationships and lack of trust between the contractors and the customers in the construction industry. Customers do not believe spontaneously the promises made by the salespeople but require real proofs. If the brands promises are not delivered, this could actually have a double-edged effect (Crespin, 2007) and even create more dissatisfaction than if no promises had been made (classical approach).

Internally, however, the branding of the offer (Concertance®) had a more powerful effect. Due to its strategic character for the group, the internal teams of sales engineers, project managers and execution teams felt more responsible and motivated to bring customer satisfaction. The fact that they were involved in a Concertance® project meant that they attached a privileged status and special resources to it. Moreover, they knew that their hierarchy carefully monitored these projects. The demanding promises promoted by the brand drove an internal change towards a more customer-driven attitude and later marketing-led corporate culture.

Concerning the Presance® brand, we can come to a similar conclusion concerning the internal adoption even though the impact of the brand has been different. The customer satisfaction survey proved that, contrarily to the Concertance® brand, most customers could actually quote the name of the Presance® brand (i.e. higher brand awareness) while very few of them, could quote its attributes. This can seem surprising at first glance but may be explained by the lack of credibility or relevance of some of the attributes selected for the customers and also for the salesmen. The positive impact of the brand in this context is related to the characteristics of the activity rather than the delivery of the brand promise itself:

- The size of the projects: small to very small projects (less than 500K€ in average); more "standardized" inputs: the customers can easily define the product or service specifications.
- The low project complexity: corresponding to technically-simple projects as compared to the other projects carried out by the group.
- The time factor: short-time cycle.

Hence, these projects usually bear less risks and uncertainties for the customer and the project network (Dubois & Gadde, 2000; Hellgren & Stjernberg, 1995). We are in a service-oriented business associated to maintenance activities. In such activities, customers often have contracts with service-providers having developed a branding strategy. For them, the brand is more easily accepted as a sign summarizing and materializing the service delivered. In this case, the brand is more easily identified as a risk reduction vector for the customer. This role is classic in traditional marketing-led markets but is really prominent in this case.

In short, based on this case study, it seems that the largest benefit of the brand does not come from the brand per se but from the branding process and the internal dynamic that it generated.

The decision to launch a branding strategy at Spie batignolles led the contractor to structure, highlight and stabilize the key elements of its processes and to attach some quality standards for each of one of them. This was particularly true for the Presance® brand, when the contractor fully realized the importance of the brand as a value-creation device.

The branding strategy enabled the firm to adopt a stronger customer-orientation, to segment its activities, and to be more selective in its bidding strategy. Thus branding one's activities is a way to uncover some informal practices and taken-for-granted procedures that generally go unnoticed. By giving the management team an occasion to explore the specificities of their activities, the branding process has been a unique opportunity to "discover" the fundamental tricks of the trade. In so doing, *branding is far from being only a marketing device and is a way for firms to reveal their best practice.*

At another level the branding process is also a unique occasion to infuse the whole organization with a marketing approach. The results of this research show that the branding process accomplished by the firm was an opportunity to create and spread procedures to the collaborators so as to increase their efficiency. From this vantage point, the branding process appears to be a disciplinary process providing the employees with a set of tools embodying the brand.

In summary, this research suggests that the role of the brand may actually be to help develop a customer orientation in the contractor's firm. Branding its offer is a way for SB to place a greater focus on the long term effects of their economic transactions and emphasizing the importance of generating positive word of mouth and repeat purchase. As such, the brand constitutes the "vehicle" materializing the contractor's shift from a transactional to a relationship perspective (Ballantyne, 2007; Grönroos, 2000; Smyth, 2000) (see Exhibit 3). In this activity, while the customer satisfaction seems independent of the brand per se; the brand seems to serve as the vehicle marketing the customer satisfaction.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Branding theory has been largely developed in the context of consumer products where it found its origin and more recently in business-to-business markets (Webster & Keller, 2004). This paper has attempted at analysing the relevance of branding in project activities.

Role of branding

The development of a branding strategy leads the contractor to identify the key elements of its processes, define corresponding standards of quality and to ground its customer relationship on more stable and committing bases. In a market situation usually characterized by a strong focus on the project and its financial details in a short-term perspective (Dubois & Gadde, 2000), the predominance of adversarial relationships between contractors and owners, the elements of stability characterizing the brand put a stronger focus on the relational elements of business transactions, and on customer satisfaction in a long term perspective. Thus branding strategy is a standardization device, which was mobilized by SB in order to infuse a more marketing oriented strategy.

Exhibit 3. Key characteristics of the relational and transactional paradigms (derived from Crespin-Mazet, 2007)

Variable	Transactional Orientation (Competitive Bidding)	Relationship Orientation
Offering	Centred on the tangible elements, on the results: products and directly related services	Global offering comprising both tangible and intangible elements (process). Focused on resources, competences, and knowledge.
Value	Value created by the supplier and distributed to the customers	Co-created with the customer and supply partners Value seen as a continuous process.
Time orientation	Short term, tactical	Mid to long term, continuous flows and processes
Focus of exchange	Each individual transaction	The customer relationship with the supplier: transaction is an episode in this long term relationship
Communication	Promotion (tactical)	Conversation and dialogue (continuous flow)
Atmosphere of the relationship: business culture (orientation)	May be adversarial due to conflicting interest. Contractual terms serve as a basis to settling conflicts. Arms-length relations.	Based on trust, co-operation, mutual orientation and commitment. Close ties: customer intimacy, open communication...
Negotiation style	Win - lose	Win - win

Going back to network theory, several contributions have highlighted the relevance of network theory to analyse the complex interplay of actors within an industrial group (Mazet, Salle & Spencer, 1995) or the dynamics of interaction between all the actors involved in a project be they internal or external to the firm (the project network, Dubois & Gadde, 2000).

This paper suggests that the brand may act as a management device to federate teams, to increase their motivation by internally federating the various internal communities of practice (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Lawrence, 1998; Orr, 1990; Wenger, 2000). This confirms some recent findings stating that the brand also has a federating power (Dacin & Brown, 2006; Handelman, 2006) but goes further by suggesting that this federating power does not only concern individual customers (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) or other external stakeholders in the project network but also internal communities of practice (internal stakeholders). These communities of practice form a new organisational setting complementing the traditional project structure, which encourages knowledge sharing, learning and change (Brown & Duguid 1991; Brown, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2000). Their existence could strongly influence the success of the implementation of a branding strategy in the actual fulfilment of the brand promise. Following this development it is worth noting the importance of institutional artefacts, and especially the brand, in the daily life of every organization. The brand is neither an "external" device, nor an "internal" tool. Rather, the brand is an immutable mobile (Latour, 1987) that circulates in the market and the organization in order to align the interests of the different stakeholders.

Brands, especially in B2B markets, are important elements in the shaping of the firm's identity and culture. The brand is not a pure image of these elements but has also a certain degree of performativity on them.

Future research

Future research should focus on the strategic relevance and importance of the brand as a managerial device to align the different groups and communities of practice inside the organization. This strand of research is interesting since it extends the traditional approach of the brand as a pure marketing device serving as an external tool to capture and create links with consumers.

Hence future research could investigate the role of the brand as a boundary-object and investigate more fully its relevance both inside and outside the organization. The brand actually "speaks" to various stakeholders, which seize and interpret it according their own needs and knowledge.

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APPENDIX - SOURCES OF EVIDENCE USED IN OUR CASE STUDY

INTERNAL SOURCES	
Individual face-to-face interviews	Several personal Interviews with each of the three brand managers of Spie batignolles
	Personal interview with the managing director of Spie Batignolles
	Personal interviews with the successive marketing directors of Spie Batignolles
	Informal exchanges with the Corporate Communications Director
Secondary data	
	General sales guide for the commercial engineer (2000)
	Sales guide dedicated to the Concertance® Brand (2003)
	Sales guide dedicated to the Presance® Brand
	SB commercial brochures: presenting each brand
	SB corporate brochures
	Various powerpoint presentations of the slides presented to the internal seminars and conventions for each brand (Conventions Concertance and Presance®)
	Various issues of the internal corporate magazine (Engagés)
	Various issues of the external corporate magazine (Convergence)
	Various issues of the internal corporate magazine dedicated to the Presence® brand (Delta)
	Various issues of the internal corporate magazine dedicated to the Concertance brand (Partenaires)
	Call for tender for the selection of a corporate communication agency presenting Spie batignolles' positioning and branding strategy
EXTERNAL SOURCES	
Secondary data	
	Customer satisfaction survey (2007) – Presance®
	Customer satisfaction survey (2005) – Presance®
	Market survey: test of the Performance brand before its market launch (Innovacorp, 2007)
	Press articles (Les Echos, mars 2004)
Individual face-to-face interviews	With 7 customers related to the Concertance® brand and offer (part of the Ph-D)
	Interviews with the communications agency in charge of developing the visual identity (logos, brochures, slides presenting the brands and offer to the customers ... for each brand,
	Various individual interviews with the sales manager, project manager and sales engineer in charge of promoting the Concertance® brand – between 2005 & 2006
	A group interview with 12 people in charge of promoting the Presance® brand (2007)