

**School of Marketing
Curtin Business School**

**The Role of Relationships versus Reputation in Determining
Perceptions of Employer Attractiveness: A Case-Based Study into how
Employer Brand Perception is formed in the Health Industry**

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Master of Philosophy (Public Relations)
of
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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:

Date:

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Abstract

In Australia and many other developed countries, there have been acute skills shortages in a number of different industries. Even with the current economic downturn, healthcare continues to have a shortfall in staffing. Building a strong employer brand offers a promising approach to this problem. Employer branding is the “package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company” (Ambler & Barrow 1996, p. 187). Using a qualitative approach, this case study of a private hospital in Australia explores the role of these concepts in building a strong employer brand. The purpose of this study is threefold: first, to identify which is more important in influencing a company’s employer brand – its reputation or relationships; second, to analyse perceptions of employer branding for nurses at different levels of their career; and third, to identify the barriers to implementing the employer branding/attractiveness concept in the health industry. A large, for-profit private hospital within Western Australia was investigated, focusing on the nursing profession. It was found that a company’s relationships with its stakeholders will have a direct influence on a company’s reputation. Therefore, the two concepts are more closely related than the existing literature (e.g. Hutton 1999) would suggest. Relationships prior to (and during) employment were seen as an important factor in projecting an attractive employer brand, a factor not previously emphasised in the employer branding literature. It was found that perceptions of factors related to employer attractiveness did differ depending on experience and life stage. However, over-promising in recruitment was identified by all employees interviewed as a major source of disenchantment. The concept of “reputation” was reviewed and it was found that negative visibility appeared to have a stronger impact than a positive reputation. Reputation was often formed via word-of-mouth from industry colleagues, hence the importance of developing strong relationships as a major step to ensuring a quality reputation. Within management there were several barriers to an effective employer branding process identified. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the implications and limitations of this study, together with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 Chapter Overview

It has now been over 10 years since Ambler and Barrow (1996) coined the term “employer brand”, defined as “the package of the functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company” (p. 187). The original push behind employer branding was for an organisation to give the same attention to managing the brand proposition to employees as was generally applied to managing the customer brand (Mosley 2007). The focus of this thesis is the use of the employer brand as a way of attracting and retaining nurses in a private hospital setting within Western Australia using a case study approach. The context of this study is relevant given the acute nursing shortage across the globe. This chapter commences with a discussion on the background of employer branding and related concepts, highlighting the gaps and inconsistencies in the extant literature. The objectives and research questions for this thesis are then introduced, together with an account of their significance. To further explain their significance, a background to the context of the study is outlined. A brief review of the research methodology is then provided. The chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background to the Research

Employer branding (EB) was originally put forward by Ambler and Barrow (1996) as a way to apply marketing and related branding principles to employee recruitment and retention. Since then, the term has become something of a buzzword in the fields of human resources, management consulting and marketing. However, while much has been written on employer branding, there is little empirical research in the field and, to date, it seems there has been no in-depth investigation of the internal processes that shape an employer brand or the barriers which may exist to creating a strong employer brand. This thesis will attempt, through a case study approach, to give a rich and

contextual explanation of these processes and barriers. Before such a task can be attempted, it is necessary to review the key areas which have contributed to the framework upon which EB is based. It has to be said that this is no easy task as EB is a cross-functional activity and field of study.

The fathers of the term, Ambler and Barrow (1996), linked employer branding to three main groups of concepts – corporate culture and identity (e.g. Balmer 2001; Hatch & Schultz 1997); internal marketing (and by extension relationship marketing) (e.g. Bansal, Mendelson & Sharma 2001; Bergstrom, Blumenthal & Crothers 2002; Bigham Bernstal 2003) and corporate reputation (e.g. Davies et al. 2003; Fombrun, Gardberg & Sever 2000; Haywood 2005). Ambler and Barrow suggested the EB concept synthesises them into a single term which can be actively measured as EB equity. They also suggested that an employer brand has a personality and traditional marketing techniques should be, *mutatis mutandis*, applicable. Berthon, Ewing and Li (2005, p. 156) defined the related construct of “employer attractiveness” as “the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization”.

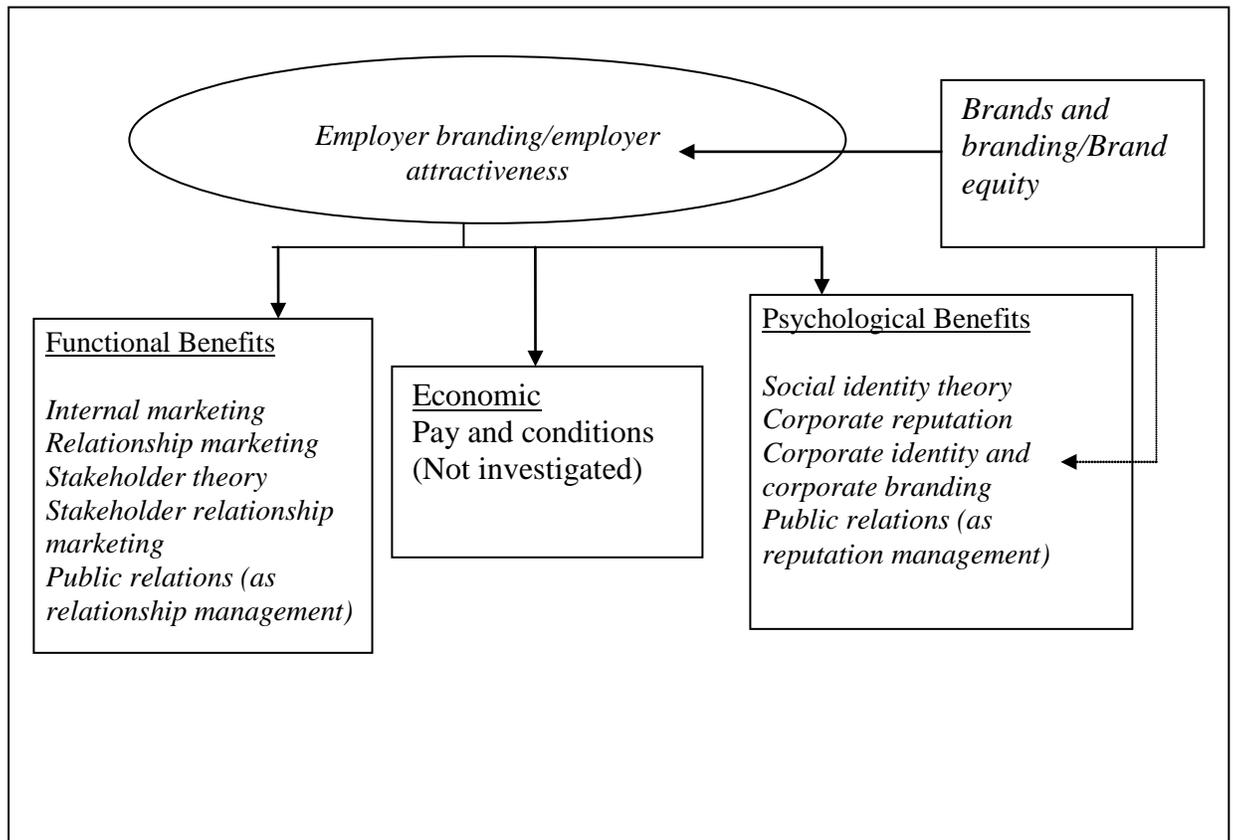
While Ambler and Barrow (1996) do not specifically refer to the public relations (PR) discipline, relationships and reputation are two primary areas of research and discussion within PR. This thesis takes the inspiration for its key research question from public relations scholar Hutton’s (1999) article which explores the fundamentals of the definition, dimensions and domain of public relations. In his article Hutton (1999) reviews the two key fields which public relations has traditionally associated itself with – reputation management and relationship management and in doing so draws on literature from relationship marketing. Hutton argued that reputation management looks primarily to publicity, spin control and the creation and management of symbols as its primary tactics where as relationship management emphasises mutual trust, compromise, co-operation and, whenever possible, win-win situations.

A review of scholarly and practitioner definitions of public relations shows that the field is linked to the concept of employer branding. For example, “public relations is the

management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center & Broom 2006, p. 5). Without employees an organisation will not be able to function, nor can it serve any other stakeholders such as customers or shareholders. Therefore, an organisation’s success or failure arguably depends largely on its employees. Within public relations scholarship, the notion of public relations as relationship management has been proposed as a paradigm for the discipline (Grunig & Hon 1999; Hutton 1999; Ledingham 2003; Ledingham & Bruning 1998, 2000). However, other scholars and industry bodies take a different approach, emphasising the concept of reputation (e.g. Haywood 2005). The British Chartered Institute of Public Relations, the peak body for public relations in the UK, emphasises reputation in its definition. “Public relations is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour” (*CIPR Careers & Education*, n.d.). Given these two contrasting approaches, this thesis will explore the meanings of reputation and relationships as applied to employer branding. The thesis will also explore which of the two approaches to public relations – reputation or relationships – is more effective in building positive employee perceptions of the employer brand.

Related to the benefits on offer to employees within an employer brand, Ambler and Barrow defined *functional* benefits as developmental and/or useful activities, *economic* as material or monetary rewards and *psychological* benefits as feelings of belonging, direction and purpose. Similarly, Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), in their more general review of brand identity, discussed the functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits of brands and the closely aligned relationship construct. Given this emphasis on the three strands of benefits offered by an employer brand and the importance of the concepts of reputation and relationships, it is useful to suggest a schematic diagram of the areas of academic thought which will be reviewed in this thesis. The complexity of the employer branding process also necessitates a roadmap for the researcher.

Figure 1.1 A diagrammatic representation of the key theoretical foundations and concepts of employer branding under consideration in this study. Note: The concepts in italics will be reviewed in depth.



1.2 Research Problems

A problem can be defined as any situation where a gap exists between the actual and ideal state and a problem statement as a “clear, precise and succinct statement of the question or issue that is to be investigated with the goal of finding an answer or solution” (Sekaran 2003, p. 70). Based on the literature introduced in section 1.1 (and discussed in greater detail in chapter 2), gaps have been identified in terms of empirical, contextual studies in the employer branding literature. As has been noted, this thesis takes a case study approach, looking at employer branding to nurses in a private hospital within Western Australia. Thus the research problems examined in this thesis are as follows:

1. Is employer attractiveness more influenced by a company's relationships or its reputation?
2. Do perceptions of employer attractiveness in the health industry differ between nurses at different levels of their career – undergraduate, early career, mid-career and at senior levels?
3. What are the barriers to implementing the employer branding/attractiveness concept in the health industry?

1.3 Research Objectives

The primary purpose of this thesis is to provide an in-depth, contextual review of employer branding in action and the constraints organisations face in developing a strong employer brand. The specific research objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify which is more important in influencing a company's employer brand – its reputation or relationships.
2. To analyse the perceptions of employer branding for nurses at different levels of their career.
3. To identify the barriers to implementing the employer branding/attractiveness concept in the health industry.

1.4 Significance of the Research

This research will make a contribution to both theory and practice, having significance in both areas. From a theoretical perspective this study draws together concepts from separate but inter-related disciplines – including management, marketing and public relations. The cross-functional nature of employer branding was highlighted from the outset by Ambler and Barrow (1996). Within their conceptual paper on employer branding, Ewing et al (2002) proposed that case-based studies would add considerable value to the understanding of employer branding and attractiveness.

The extant employer brand management literature is dominated by conceptual studies with only a few recent empirical studies. Empirical examinations of employer branding in either the commercial or non-profit sectors are limited (see Kimpakorn & Dimmitt 2007; Knox & Freeman 2006; Lievens 2007) and it appears that there have as yet been no studies which have gone “deep inside” an organisation to see employer branding processes at work.

This study aims to make an original contribution to the field of public relations by using an open system approach, with regards to theory development, as proposed by Broom (2006). Broom suggested that public relations needed to move beyond its own walls and to connect with research in communication and human behaviour at all levels. This study should provide better theoretical understanding of corporate relationships, brand and reputation and the interplay between these concepts.

From a public relations perspective it is believed that this is the first empirical study which looks at the contribution public relations can and should make with regards to employer branding. The question of the relative influence of global reputation versus relationships in creating employer attractiveness is one which has not been given sufficient attention. Indeed, in the public relations literature it has also been noted that research on organisation-employee relationships remains largely untouched and represents a research opportunity (Ledingham 2003). At a conceptual level, it is also true that public relations continues to have an “identity crisis”, first identified over 20 years ago (Bitter 1986). This thesis does not profess to be able to solve the crisis, but by examining the role of relationships versus reputation in developing an employer brand, the merits of these two fields as the dominant paradigms for public relations research and practice will be examined.

Within the related area of stakeholder theory and stakeholder relationship management, there have been calls for a “names and faces approach” to stakeholder theory (McVea & Freeman 2005, p. 69). The authors suggested that academics and practitioners alike

should, instead of lumping stakeholders into catch-all categories, come to see stakeholders as human beings with names, faces and families. It is true that public relations scholarship and stakeholder theory can place employees into one category while even ignoring potential employees. This thesis, under research question two, investigates the differences within this stakeholder grouping to see if there is value in a more “segmented” approach.

This thesis also has practical, managerial significance. Identifying, retaining and replacing the best talent in an organisation is the key issue likely to keep executives awake at night, according to a survey by Accenture (Matthews 2007). The shortage of skilled workers has become a recent dominant theme in the popular press. The skills shortage remains a pressing employment issue in Western Australia amid record low unemployment figures (Moses 2006). The recent economic downturn has not diminished the need for nurses, with recent newspaper articles warning that care is in jeopardy because of the shortage (Healy 2008; O’Leary 2008). The case hospital under study is in Western Australia and as the State currently has extremely low unemployment, it represents a suitable case for studying employer branding. The healthcare industry in Australia - and, indeed, across the world - is one area where workers are in chronic short supply. It has been reported that the shortage of nurses is getting worse even as demand for their services is rising (Creswell 2005). In 2002 the West Australian State Government launched a \$16 million recruitment campaign for nurses ('\$16 million for WA recruitment' 2002). There is now genuine concern about predicted skill shortages in this highly critical occupation (Preston 2005). Meanwhile, in other countries including the US and England, a similar situation is reported for both doctors and nurses. In the UK the problem of a shortage of trained nurses has been acknowledged as a human resource crisis (Newman, Maylor & Chansarkar 2001). By 2020 the United States will lack 200,000 doctors (Fantin 2005). This problem will continue to be exacerbated with the aging population. In Australia, the proportion of those aged 65 and over increased from 12.6 per cent in 2001 to 13.3 per cent in 2006 and it is projected that it will double to 25 per cent by 2047 (Costello 2007). Also, the proportion of the population aged 55 to 64 years has experienced a large increase from 9 per cent of the population in 2001 to 11

per cent in 2006 (Costello 2007). Projected population data shows that the next decade will experience a shrinking of the working population and if the low unemployment rate stays at its current level - 4.3 per cent in June 2007 (Australian Bureau of Statistics), there will certainly be a lack in supply of a suitable workforce. The need for companies to differentiate themselves in the employer marketplace is becoming critical (Hogan 2002). Identifying, retaining and replacing the best talent in an organisation is a key issue for organisations and will be examined in this thesis.

With regard to the internal constraints and barriers on organisations, identifying these barriers is the first step in overcoming them. While a strong employer brand is now perceived as vital in the war for talent, no previous study appears to have looked at the constraints and barriers faced by organisations in the development and implementation of a strong employer brand.

1.5 Context of the Study

As the focus of this thesis is the employer brand as a way of attracting and retaining nurses in a private hospital setting, it is useful to look at nurses, whether as a “target market” for branding efforts (to use marketing terminology), as a target public (to use public relations terminology), a recruitment pool or a stakeholder group. An in-depth study of registered nurses in Western Australia (WA) was carried out in 2002 and provides an insight into this profession (Preston 2005). Nursing continues to be highly segregated along gender lines. While gender segregation of occupations has been dissipating over recent decades, nursing has remained an overwhelmingly female activity (*Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Social Trends, Catalogue No. 4120, 2005, Paid Work: Nursing workers 2005*). Nursing is widely seen as a relatively low paying occupation and this is supported by the data (Preston 2005). The particular status of nursing as a profession and its relationship to the “medical dominance” of doctors has attracted the attention of scholars, particularly from the sociological and feminist fields (Porter 1992; Wearing 2004). The history of the relationship between and within the health occupations has enabled a specific division of labour to occur in Australia

(Wearing 2004). Nursing is a highly feminised profession, has many part-time workers, many of whom have dependent children, is relatively poorly paid and its workforce is decreasing (Preston 2005).

1.6 Research Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature and uses a singular case study approach, looking at a large, for-profit private hospital within Australia, focusing on the nursing profession. The case study incorporated mainly qualitative data from in-depth interviews and focus groups with employees, managers and directors at different hierarchical and experiential levels within the organisation and prospective employees outside the organisation as well as doctors, who are not directly employed by the organisation but do work within it and other hospitals. As well as in-depth interviews and focus groups, a quantitative survey conducted by the organisation during the period of the study, and documentary evidence – including advertising by the organisation and the organisation’s website - have been used in order to triangulate the data (Yin 2003).

1.7 Chapter Summary and Thesis Outline

This chapter began with a background and discussion of employer branding and related concepts. The research problems and research objectives were then introduced followed by a justification for significance of the research project. The research methodology was briefly outlined and an overview of the context of the study was discussed.

This thesis has six chapters as well as references and appendices. Chapter 2 provides a critical review of relevant aspects of the employer branding literature and the literature on branding in general of relevance to EB. The literature which feeds into the EB concepts is then reviewed divided under two of the streams of the EB concept – functional benefits and psychological benefits. Under the concept of psychological benefits, the literature on social identity theory, corporate reputation, corporate identity and branding and public relations as reputation management is reviewed. Under

functional benefits, literature on internal and relationship marketing, stakeholder theory, stakeholder relationship marketing and public relations as relationship management is reviewed. Chapter 3 provides detail on the research questions and research context. Chapter 4 provides a description of the research methodology used in the thesis, while Chapter 5 contains the data analysis and discussion of the results. The thesis concludes with Chapter 6 which discusses the implications of the research findings, reviews the limitations of the study and suggests recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.0 Chapter Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a background to the research, beginning with a detailed literature review of the key related concepts and theoretical foundations of employer branding. High employer brand equity is proposed as a way of attracting and retaining skilled staff. The notion of employer branding as a cross-disciplinary function will be reviewed. However, in order to understand employer branding, it is important to appreciate the development of various scholars' views of branding itself and therefore the topic of brands, branding, brand equity and corporate branding will be reviewed. This study focuses on two of the three dimensions of EB identified by Ambler and Barrow (1996), namely the functional and psychological benefits offered by employers. It will be proposed that the concept of relationships and associated themes are best understood as aspects of the functional benefits dimension. The psychological benefits dimension of EB will be interpreted in terms of reputation and related concepts. The economic benefits dimension of EB is considered beyond the scope of this thesis as communications managers lack direct control over employees' pay and conditions. Theories including social identity theory, corporate reputation and corporate identity will provide a framework for the discussion of psychological benefits. A cross disciplinary approach will be evident in the discussion of functional benefits as theories relating to stakeholders, internal marketing and relationship marketing drawn from the fields of management, marketing and public relations are reviewed. This literature review helps develop the research problem and research questions which will be outlined in Chapter 3.

2.1 Brands and Branding: The Rise of Employer Branding

With the recent skills shortage across many disciplines, including health care, it is perhaps no surprise that in practitioner journals and in the academic literature, the rise of

the concept of employer branding has seen it become a “hot topic”. The employer brand (EB) concept appears to have been first discussed, if not coined, more than a decade ago by Ambler and Barrow (1996). The authors defined the “employer brand” as “the package of the functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company” (p. 187). They justify these three strands by referring as far back as the medieval theologian San Bernadino of Siena, who suggested there were three main consumer benefits from goods and services bought – *virtuositas* (function), *raritas* (market price) and *complacibilitas* (psychological benefits). Related to EB, Ambler and Barrow defined *functional* benefits as developmental and/or useful activities, *economic* as material or monetary rewards and *psychological* benefits as feelings of belonging, direction and purpose. Similarly, as discussed later under branding, Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), in their more general review of brand identity, discussed the functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits of brands and the closely aligned relationship construct. Ambler and Barrow (1996) argued the EB concept has most application in high value-added, service businesses. While Ambler and Barrow pointed to businesses that have high salaries and few employees it could be argued that health is the most “value-added” service of all as most humans value their health and life above all else.

2.1.1 Cross-Functional Nature of Employer Branding

The EB concept appears to be a relatively recent phenomenon. However, as early as 1992, Maurer, Howe and Lee (1992), writing in *Personnel Psychology*, made the interdisciplinary leap and suggested that recruitment could be viewed in terms of marketing management. Employer branding is both a concept and a process at firm level, with writers looking at employer branding from the disciplines of public relations and communications management (eg. Backhaus 2004), marketing (eg. Adamson 2004; Knox & Freeman 2006; Ritson 2002; Simms 2003), advertising (eg. Berthon, Ewing & Li 2005; Ewing et al. 2002), human resources management (eg. Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Brandon 2005; Lievens 2007; Martin et al. 2004), psychology (Lievens & Highhouse 2003), general management (Backhaus, Stone & Heiner 2002; Martin et al.

2004) and quality management (Bansal, Mendelson & Sharma 2001). Tensions between the disciplines are evident in article titles such as ‘HR or Marketing: Who gets staff on side?’ (Simms 2003), ‘The marketing-human resources interface: Why a marketer might like to treat the director of Human Resources with respect’ (Adamson 2004), and ‘Where should employer branding sit?’ (‘Where should employer branding sit?’ 2004). There have even been dire warnings from the management discipline of the “perils of transdisciplinary extension” (Gunasekara 2002). However, as discussed under relationship marketing, in section 2.3.4, several authors espouse cross-disciplinary approaches, including Duncan and Moriarty (1998) who believe that cross-functional management is required to plan and monitor messages for strategic consistency. They suggested that cross-functional management breaks down walls between departments and stakeholder groups – and helps institutionalise feedback and organisational learning. Communication must be managed as a boundary-spanning activity to achieve linkages in a learning organisation (Duncan & Moriarty 1998). Ewing et al (2002) conceded that employer branding could well be another business buzz-word, and that it may be a case of “old wine in new bottles”, but they suggested that does not necessarily render the term worthless, as creating a new label can focus attention and scholarship and help the development of formal research constructs.

Maurer, Howe and Lee (1992) suggested that viewing corporate recruiting as marketing offers three advantages: it offers conceptual parallels useful for organising and directing recruiting research; it invites the use of marketing literature as a basis for review and design of recruiting research and the job marketing concept suggests marketing management literature as a conceptual framework for recruitment practices (Maurer, Howe & Lee 1992).

While cross-disciplinary approaches are called for, it also makes the employer branding concept more complex. In fact, the frustration a new scholar may feel at the seeming cross-over, confusion and fuzzy boundaries between the issues of identity, image, branding, relationship management, reputation and the corporate brand is, surprisingly, also shared by leading academics. The convergence of the issues of identity, reputation

and the corporate brand is seen as a crisis in strategy (Schultz, Hatch & Holten Larsen 2002) but also an opportunity. Hatch and Schultz (2002) used the metaphor of the “Tower of Babel” to describe the “conceptual confusion” and acknowledge the frustration felt by researchers trying to define key terms. They also suggest that while there is confusion there is also a richness to be found in the research. Another reason for this convergence is the breakdown of boundaries between the internal and external aspects of the firm. Balmer (2001) uses the metaphor of a “fog” enveloping business identity studies and made reference to corporate reputation, total corporate communications and corporate branding and the interplay between these concepts.

Clearing the fog completely is beyond the scope of this research. However, an attempt will be made to clarify the confusion by linking concepts such as corporate reputation and identity with the psychological benefits dimensions of EB. It will be argued that social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael 1989; Tajfel 1982) provides a theoretical basis for this association. Internal marketing and other aspects of employee/employer relationship management will be viewed as potential facets of EB’s functional dimension.

Figure 2.1 A diagrammatic representation of the key theoretical foundations and concepts of employer branding under consideration in this study. Note: The concepts in italics will be reviewed in depth.

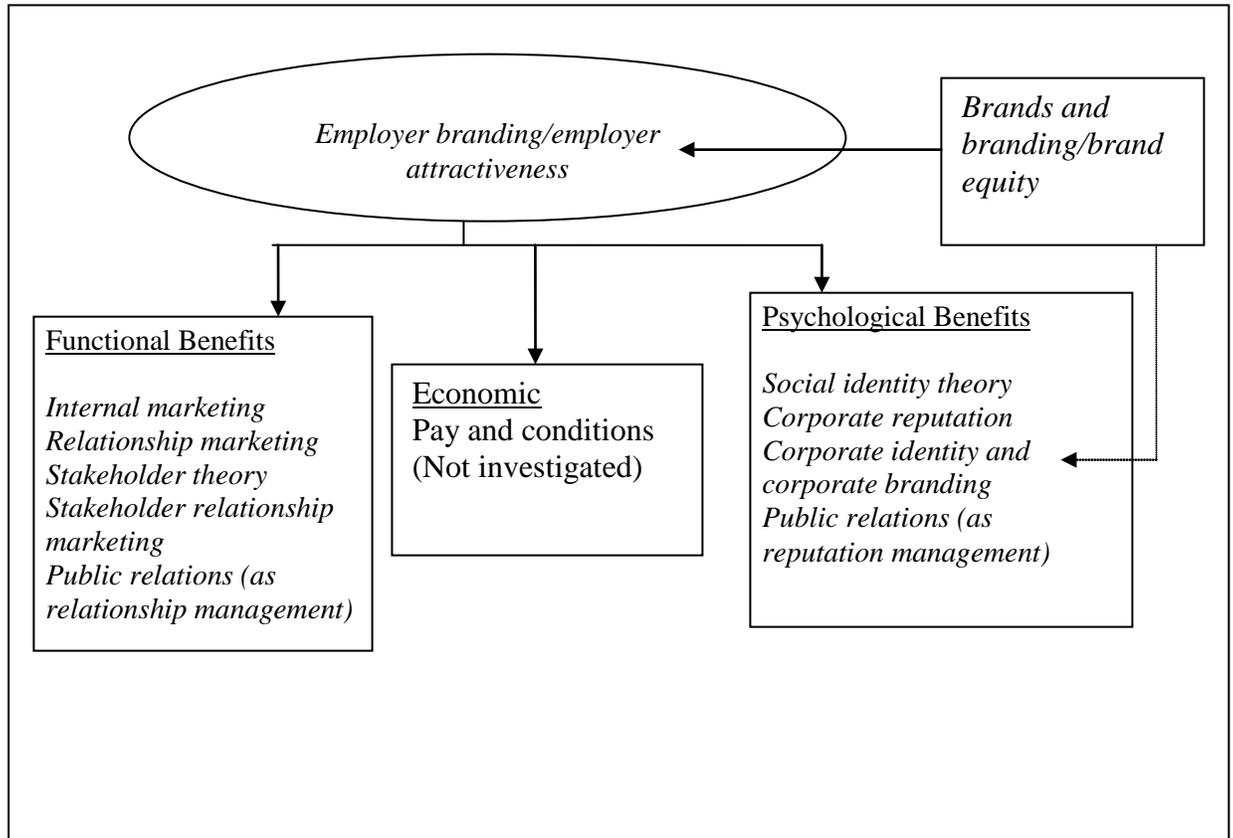


Figure 2.1, introduced in Chapter 1, shows the relationship between the key theoretical constructs of interest in this study. The three strands of employer branding, the functional, psychological and economic benefits, as delineated by Ambler and Barrow (1996), have been noted. However, economic benefits will not be given detailed attention in this study. This is for two main reasons: firstly, as discussed above, the negotiation of economic benefits for employees is usually outside the influence of the marketing and/or corporate communications department. Secondly, economic factors can be particularly difficult to differentiate as a benefit given the tax regulations placed on the private health industry. In particularly private, for-profit hospitals (as opposed to charitable and government hospitals) are not able to offer their staff generous salary

packaging which is on offer in the government and Church-affiliated hospitals in Australia.

2.1.2 The Employer Branding Concept

Ambler and Barrow (1996) linked employer branding to three main groups of concepts – corporate culture and identity (e.g. Balmer 2001; Hatch & Schultz 1997); internal marketing (and by extension relationship marketing) (e.g. Bansal, Mendelson & Sharma 2001; Bergstrom, Blumenthal & Crothers 2002; Bigham Bernstal 2003) and corporate reputation (e.g. Davies et al. 2003; Fombrun, Gardberg & Sever 2000; Haywood 2005). Ambler and Barrow (1996) suggested the EB concept synthesises them into a single term which can be actively measured as EB equity. They also suggested that an employer brand has a personality and traditional marketing techniques should be, *mutatis mutandis*, applicable. The authors discussed and illustrated the “virtuous circle” which shows the link between the quality of employees and the quality of the product/service. Ambler and Barrow (1996) conducted semi-structured interviews with senior executives from 27 companies about the relevance of branding to human resources management and concluded that branding does have relevance in the context of employment.

Corporate culture was identified by Ambler and Barrow (1996) as major concept related to employer branding. However, a study of corporate culture and its effect on the employer brand is beyond the boundaries of this study. As discussed in the introduction, while it could be argued that corporate culture has an effect on and is ever-present in all areas of marketing practice, it is usually beyond the direct control of the marketing or HR professional. Equally, economic benefits, the third dimension of EB identified by Ambler and Barrow (1996) are not investigated in this study for similar reasons. The focus of the research is on the two dimensions of EB identified by Ambler and Barrow over which marketing and corporate communications professionals have arguably more control, namely corporate reputation and internal/relationship marketing. It will be

argued that reputation is a key aspect of the psychological benefits articulated by Ambler and Barrow. Internal/relationship marketing can be viewed as facets of EB's potential functional benefits. The two dimensions of employer branding – reputation and relationships – will each be examined in detail following an overview of the EB concept and the theoretical underpinnings of brands and branding on which it is based.

2.1.3 Employer Brand Equity

It has been argued that current and potential employees are as critical a stakeholder group as customers to knowledge-focused organisations – sometimes more so (Ewing et al. 2002). Pointing to the skills shortage in the knowledge economy, Ewing et al (2002) opined that in the coming years the fight for skilled workers amongst firms may be even more intense than the fight for customers. “Employment branding is concerned with building an image in the minds of the potential labour market that the company, above all others, is a great place to work” (Ewing et al. 2002, p. 12). The authors acknowledged that recruitment advertising has existed for a long time, but that companies are increasingly using the techniques of the best brand builders.

Based on Aaker (1991), Ewing et al (2002, p. 14) defined employment brand equity as “a set of employment brand assets linked to an employment brand, its name and symbol that add to (or subtract from) the value provided by an organisation to that organisation's employees”.

It is worth pointing out a different emphasis in the Ewing et al (2002) definition of employment brand equity and employment branding. Of the two definitions, the Ewing et al (2002) definition of employment branding concerns itself only with the potential labour market while their definition of employment brand equity only refers to an organisation's employees. It is also worth noting that in their paper, Ewing et al (2002) refer to *Employment* Branding rather than *employer* branding, the term used by Ambler and Barrow (1996). However, they do not comment on the distinction and the terms appear to be interchangeable. In a later article, Ewing, writing with Berthon and Li

(Berthon, Ewing & Li 2005), drops employment branding and uses the employer branding term.

Ewing et al (2002) identified three categories of print advertising, using the Young & Rubicam (Y&R) Brand Asset Valuator dimensions, which promote different employer brand identities in an endeavour to build employment brand equity. The categories outlined are:

1. Transnational Inc: Status & Mobility (global network - big & successful). The employment proposition for Transnational Inc is “we’re big, we’re multinational, we’re a respected and admired employer – why look any further?” Examples included banks and financial service providers.
2. Mission to Mars: Excitement (new experiences). For Mission to Mars the organisation and/or industry is fairly new and possibly not that well known. The challenge is to create awareness and reduce any potential psychological risks. Examples included new technology spin-offs and start-ups.
3. The ‘Local’ (pub): identification (source similarity). The third category, according to Ewing et al (2002) uses source similarity – with the advertisements containing current employees in an attempt to attract potential employees. Examples found by Ewing et al (2002) included JP Morgan, IBM and Goldman Sachs.

The fourth Y&R brand equity driver is differentiation but Ewing et al (2002) argued that differentiation should be a feature across all employment branding and is therefore generic. Indeed, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, p. 502) defined employer branding as “the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity, and the employer brand as a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors”, in a paper which explored the conceptual foundations of the EB.

The notion of differentiation may be a basic branding concept, and indeed there is good evidence to suggest that a distinct employer brand is important to attracting applicants (Lievens & Highhouse 2003). However, a content analysis of corporate recruitment descriptions on the recruitment website, monster.com, found that most organisations fail

to differentiate themselves in any material way (Backhaus 2004). In the Backhaus study, drawn from corporate descriptions posted at Monster.com in the spring of 2002, it was found that firms tend to focus squarely on corporate attributes with the leading words being successful and large. This tendency to boastfulness about size and success appears similar to the “Transnational Inc” category defined by Ewing et al (2002) and, Backhaus suggested, could be linked to social identity theory. Social identity theory will be further explored in section 2.2.1. However, Backhaus also raised the question of whether the dominance of advertising related to size and success was a useful strategy, given the other important factors related to employer attractiveness. This question will be further explored in this thesis. The firms devoted an average of only 5 per cent of text to descriptions of compensation and benefits and an average of only 3 per cent was used to describe employee support. Backhaus (2004) also found that different industries tended to have different norms for promoting themselves. For example the electronics industry advertisements were predominantly focused on product developments, service innovations and boasts of technological growth. Little was mentioned about employee support, advancement opportunities, culture, climate or work/family balance. Backhaus (2004) suggested that unless companies shun the industry-wide traditions, they will have difficulty standing out from the crowd and may not succeed in the battle for the best and brightest candidates.

Collins and Stevens (2002) used the concept of customer-based brand equity in their study of the application decisions of engineering students. The authors looked at how positive exposure to four early recruitment related activities – publicity, sponsorship, word of mouth endorsements and advertising - might affect the decisions of the students to apply for particular firms. With a relatively small sample of 133 students, Collins and Stevens found that three of the early recruitment related practices – publicity, word of mouth and advertising - had direct effects on employer brand image.

2.1.4 Employer Attractiveness

The notion of “employer attractiveness” is closely related to “employer branding” (Berthon, Ewing & Li 2005). Berthon, Ewing and Li (2005, p. 156) defined employer attractiveness as “the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation”. An important distinction should be made, however, in that Ambler and Barrow’s concept of EB encompasses both existing employees and potential employees while Berthon, Ewing and Li concentrate on potential employees. Berthon, Ewing and Li (2005) developed an employer attractiveness scale – and they stated that the scale’s five factor structure is essentially a refinement and extension of the three factors proposed by Ambler and Barrow (1996) for employer branding. As discussed above, these initial three factors are: psychological, functional and economic. Berthon, Ewing and Li’s five factors are interest value and social value (which, they say, capture the psychological benefits), development value and application value (which, they suggest, capture functional benefits) and economic benefits. However, looking in more depth at these five factors, there appear to be some cross-over in the factors and their alignment to Ambler and Barrow’s three initially identified factors.

The factors identified by Berthon, Ewing and Li (2005, p. 159) as psychological are:

- Interest value, which assesses the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides an exciting work environment, novel work practices and that makes use of the employee’s creativity to produce high-quality, innovative products and services.
- Social value, which assesses the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides a working environment that is fun, happy, provides good collegial relationships and a team atmosphere.

The factors categorised by Berthon, Ewing and Li (2005, p. 162) as functional are:

- Development value, which assesses the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides recognition, self-worth and confidence, coupled with a career enhancing experience and a springboard to future employment.

- Application value, which assesses the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides an opportunity for the employee to apply what they have learned and to teach others in an environment that is both customer-oriented and humanitarian.

Ambler and Barrow (1996) and Berthon, Ewing and Li (2005) identified the importance of economic value - the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides above-average salary, compensation and promotional opportunities. However, as previously stated, since creating such economic value is usually outside the direct control of corporate and marketing communications managers, its further investigation is beyond the scope of this study.

It could be suggested that some of these factors are not purely “functional” or “psychological” but contain elements of each. For example, development value, which looks at concepts such as recognition, self worth and confidence appears to contain psychological benefit factors. Application value, which discusses the notion of a humanitarian environment, also seems to go beyond a purely functional benefit and at least partly concerns meeting employees’ higher-order needs.

It is also apparent that Berthon, Ewing and Li’s (2005) taxonomy of the elements of employer attractiveness may be incomplete. Other potential attributes include convenient location – a functional value (Hieronimus, Schaefer & Schroder 2005; Turban, Forret & Hendrickson 1998). Another omission is the concept of flexibility or work-life balance, a factor cited as the number one career goal of 37,000-plus US undergraduates surveyed by Universum in 2006 (Gerdes 2006). Corporate social performance (Turban & Greening 1997) is not isolated but is referenced by Berthon, Ewing and Li (2005) with the concept of a humanitarian environment in the context of application value. The sample frame of the Berthon, Ewing and Li (2005) study could be viewed as a reason behind these omissions. As the authors point out, the study was conducted among undergraduate business school students in Western Australia. These students, at the start of their career and perhaps already used to studying away from

home, may have been prepared to relocate to find the right job. Arguably, for them, convenience of location would be less significant. Also, while work-life balance does appear to be a factor of interest to younger people (Gerdes 2006), this concept also may be more of a consideration for older workers with family responsibilities.

In another recent study of employer attractiveness, Knox and Freeman (2006) conducted a survey of potential recruits and recruiters in international service organisations to test the impact of employer brand image on job application intention and the congruency of employer brand image between potential recruits and their recruiters. The study found that while there is a correlation between an attractive employer brand image and likelihood to apply, only moderate values of the correlation coefficients were found. Knox and Freeman (2006) also found significant differences between internal and external employer brand images – in their research, recruiters have an “inflated view” of how potential recruits see the firm. Knox and Freeman (2006) suggested this difference points to a need to develop a stronger internal and external marketing approach to the recruitment market.

With a similar theme, Lievens (2007) set out to study the relative importance of different aspects of employer brand beliefs across various groups of individuals ranging from the general labour pool to actual applicants and current employees. Lievens’ study centred on the Belgian army, which is facing both recruitment and retention challenges. He sought to study the differences in the views of the current employees, actual applicants and the general labour pool towards instrumental (functional and economic) functions and symbolic (psychological) beliefs about the organisation. In the context of the army, Lievens suggested, instrumental characteristics might refer to pay and benefits such as the opportunities to travel. Symbolic attributes can be viewed using Aaker’s brand personality scale, adapted by Lievens (2007), who suggested they boil down to six distinct factors: sincerity, cheerfulness, excitement, competence, prestige and ruggedness. The study revealed that actual applicants had consistently more favourable perceptions about an employer’s instrumental and symbolic attributes than potential applicants. Perhaps of more interest, was that actual applicant perceptions were found to

be consistently higher than employee perceptions. This seems to indicate that a difference exists between perceived image of the army among applicants and among existing employees. Lievens suggested this may partially explain why there exists substantial attrition among enlisted recruits.

Both the Lievens (2007) and the Knox and Freeman (2006) studies point to the gaps in perceptions among those internal and external to the firm. Interestingly, Knox and Freeman found that recruiters in the service organisation studied had better perceptions than potential recruits while Lievens found that actual applicants for the Belgian Army had more favourable perceptions of employer attractiveness than the army employees. An unrelated study, which focused on the more general concept of corporate brand and used the specifically develop corporate personality scale, (Davies & Chun 2002), also showed that gaps do exist between the internal “identity” (defined by the authors as the internal stakeholders’ perceptions) and the external image of an organisation and that the nature of gaps can differ. These studies are in direct opposition to the view expounded by Meyers (2003), who did not agree that there is simultaneously an employer brand, a consumer brand and a stockholder brand, for example. He suggested that there is only one brand identity which is “chosen by all stakeholders and which unifies stakeholders and defines the community” (Meyers 2003, p. 23). Meyers’ views are not backed by empirical research but his reasoning is that mass media coverage and mass stock ownership in developed countries means that boundaries between consumer, employee and stockholder are collapsing. The notion of falling boundaries is further explored by other authors (Duncan & Moriarty 1997; Hatch & Schultz 1997) but it is unusual to make a case for a single brand identity, especially given Meyers’ further point that organisations have no control over the associations that brand users make.

2.1.4.1 Reputations versus Relationships

As has been noted previously, one of the main objectives of this study is to investigate the question of whether employer attractiveness is more influenced by a company’s relationships or its reputation. The focus on reputation versus relationships is inspired by

Hutton et al (2001) who raised significant questions on the role and guiding philosophies of corporate communications, following an empirical study of Fortune 500 companies. Hutton et al (2001) contrasted *reputation* management and *relationship* management as opposing concepts and guiding philosophies for the profession of public relations.

Conceptually, Hutton et al (2001) suggested, it is unclear whether reputation can be truly managed, given that reputation is the outcome of all of an organisation's activities. As public relations departments have little control over most of the dimensions of these activities - such as financial performance, quality of employees, organisational ethics and quality of products – it may be dangerous to claim to be managers of reputation. Hutton et al (2001) also pointed out that reputations are generally viewed as global perceptions that may vary dramatically by individual and stakeholder group. A person's perception of an organisation is not based on a mathematical formula but usually an overall, affective impression (Hutton et al. 2001). Clearly members of different stakeholder groups, or even of the same group, may form different impressions.

It is unclear whether reputation incorporates the same kind of loyalty and forgiveness that comes with brands and relationships (Hutton et al. 2001). The premise is that those with personal familiarity of an organisation and its people may be more forgiving than those who only know an organisation through reputation. Hutton et al (2001) asserted that reputation as a concept is far more relevant to people who have no direct ties to an organisation whereas relationships are more relevant to people who have relatively close connections with an organisation, such as employees, customers and stockholders (Hutton et al. 2001). This study will deal with two key stakeholders – employees and potential employees. Another important question raised by Hutton et al. (2001), which has relevance to this study, is the circumstances under which reputation management should be the guiding philosophy for an organisation or agency. They suggested that reputations may be more relevant to organisations that depend upon a constant stream of new customers, donors, employees or other stakeholders whereas reputation might be less important to organisations that have relatively few and longstanding relationships with key stakeholders. In the terms of this study, hospitals certainly depend on a

constant stream of new employees. Using Hutton et al's (2001) argument, could reputation be more important to hospitals seeking new employees on a regular basis? This question will be pursued in this study.

Hutton et al's (2001) fundamental questions follow their empirical findings that most corporate communications managers thought that their most important role was managing an organisation's *reputation*. Hutton (1999) had argued in an earlier article that public relations should be defined as "managing strategic relationships". Hutton et al (2001) did not have an answer for the apparent disconnect between practitioner thinking – reputation is all – and the academic view that relationship management is essential. However, they suggested that if reputation management is the new face of corporate public relations that the implications for public relations research, education and practice are enormous (Hutton et al. 2001). The apparently dichotomous concepts of reputation and relationships as delineated by Hutton et al. (2001) may be aligned respectively with EB's psychological and functional dimensions (Ambler and Barrow 1996).

2.1.5 Brands: Theoretical Underpinnings

In the previous section the related concepts of employer branding and employer attractiveness were introduced and explained. It was noted that employer branding is a cross-functional concept. The contrasting concepts of reputation management versus relationship management were reviewed as key concepts of relevance to employer branding. To place the concept of employer branding in context, it would seem prudent to now look at the concept and definitions of branding and brand in general. While the experts agree that branding is required in organisations (e.g. Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; de Chenatony & McDonald 2003; Duncan & Moriarty 1997; Ind 1997; Schultz, Hatch & Holten Larsen 2002), there is still debate over the definition of "brand". There persists a lack of clarity about the term (Bergstrom, Blumenthal & Crothers 2002). The concept has now proliferated into multiple meanings (Lisa Wood 2000). Wood (2000) noted different approaches to defining the brand construct, depending on different philosophies

such as product plus and holistic branding, and the stakeholder perspective (from the consumer or the brand owner's perspective). Scholars such as Wood (2000) still refer back to the 1960 American Marketing Association definition, of a brand as "a name, a term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Lisa Wood 2000, p. 664). However, it is acknowledged by Wood that this definition has been criticised as being too product-oriented and with a heavy emphasis on visual features.

Bergstrom, Blumenthal and Crothers (2002, p. 134) defined brand as "the sum total of all perceived functional and emotional aspects of a product or service". This dichotomy of the functional and emotional benefits offered by a brand is acknowledged by scholars such as Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), who also added the concept of a self-expressive benefit where a brand provides a vehicle by which a person can show a particular self image. This self-expressive concept can be understood in terms of social identity theory, discussed in detail in section 2.2.1 and hence may be thought of as bringing psychological benefit to the consumer. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) made the point that a strong brand should have a clear identity. While they emphasised that a meaningful functional benefit of the brand provides a significant sustainable advantage, it could also "put a box around the brand" (D. Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, p. 48). In contrast, a brand with a strong emotional or self-expressive benefit provides a higher order basis for relationships. A brand identity system should therefore include a relationship element (D. Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000). As will be seen, this philosophy is echoed in the relationship marketing and public relations literature, discussed under sections 2.3.4 and 2.3.5.

From a product perspective, de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1999) viewed the brand as a complex entity linking manufacturers' activities with perceptions in consumers' minds. Many common brand definitions focus on customers and not on other stakeholder such as employees. According to Capon et al (2001, p. 218), at the most fundamental level, "branding is the act of creating and sustaining a distinction".

This concept of distinctiveness is echoed by de Chernatony and McDonald (2003), who described a successful brand as an identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant, unique, sustainable added values which match their needs more closely.

A brand identity is the visual, emotional and cultural image that a consumer associates with a company or product (Capon et al. 2001). Hankinson (2001) described a brand as the totality of perceptions surrounding a product, a service or an organisation. Some of the diverse interpretations of the brand have included the brand as: logo, legal instrument, company, shorthand, risk reducer, positioning, personality, a cluster of values, vision, adding value and/or identity (de Chenatony 2006). However, the concept of a “brand” as a logo is obsolete in today’s complex environment (de Chernatony & Dall’Olmo Riley 1999). “Branding – the verb – is about adding a higher level of emotional meaning to a product or service, thereby increasing its value to customers and other stakeholder” (Bergstrom, Blumenthal & Crothers 2002, p. 134). This concept of emotional meaning will be explored later in the literature review but it is interesting to note that this definition goes beyond customers.

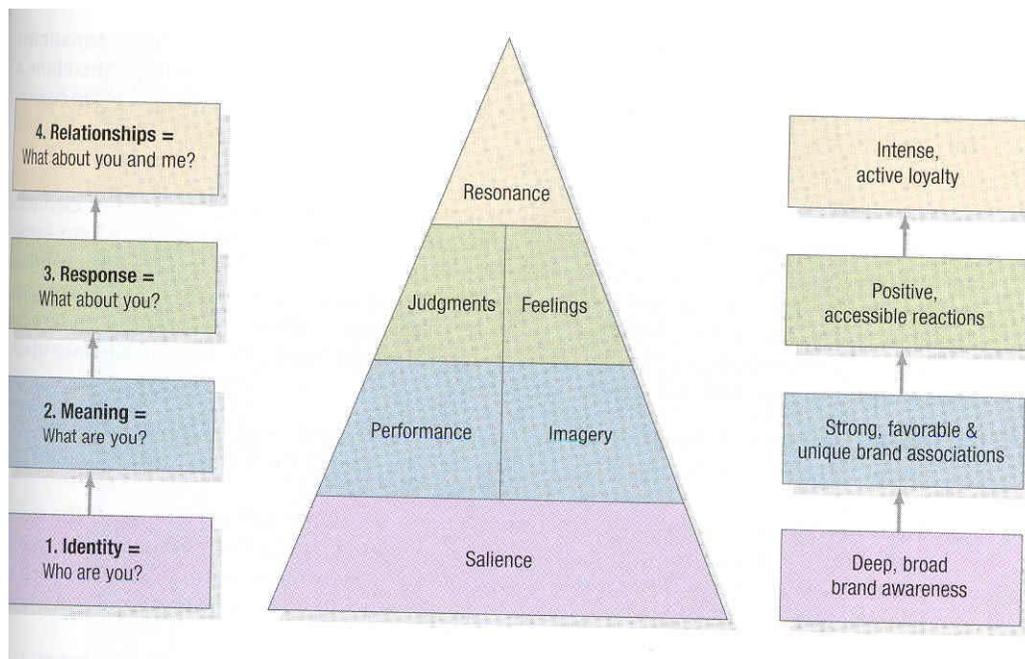
2.1.6 Brand Equity

The previous section looked at the multiple and complex definitions surrounding brand and branding. From an organisational perspective it has been seen that brands have value. In line with this concept, brand equity has progressed as one major area of study in the brand literature. Brand equity can be defined as the “brand assets (or liabilities) linked to a brand’s name and symbol that add to (or subtract from) a product or service” (D. Aaker & Joachimsthaler 2000, p.17). According to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) there are four dimensions which influence brand equity – brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and brand loyalty. Keller (1993; Keller 2001) views the notion of brand equity from the point of view of the consumer. He suggested that high levels of brand awareness and a positive brand image should increase the

probability of brand choice as well as produce greater consumer loyalty and decrease vulnerability to competitive marketing actions.

Keller's (2001) customer-based brand equity (CBBE) pyramid (see Figure 2.2) has six brand-building blocks: salience, performance, imagery, judgements, feelings and resonance. The model lays out a series of steps for building a strong brand: (1) establish the proper brand identity, (2) create the appropriate brand meaning, (3) elicit the right brand responses, and (4) forge the appropriate brand relationships with customers. The base of the pyramid, salience, relates to how often and easily the brand is evoked under various purchase or consumption situations; brand performance relates to how the product or service meets customers' functional needs; brand imagery deals with the extrinsic properties of the product or service, including the ways in which the brand attempts to meet customers' psychological or social needs; brand judgements focus on the customers' own personal opinions and evaluations, brand feelings are customers' emotional response and reactions with respect to the brand; brand resonance – at the top of the pyramid – refers to the nature of the relationship that customers have with the brand and the extent to which customers feel they are in-sync with the brand. It is important to note that the model emphasises the duality of the brand – the rational (on the left hand side of the pyramid) and the emotional route on the right-hand side (Keller 2001).

Figure 2.2 The Customer-based brand equity pyramid



Source: Keller (2001), 'Building customer-based brand equity', *Marketing Management*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 14-19.

2.1.7 Emotional Branding

Looking at the concept of feelings in branding this has been taken to its ultimate level with the concept of “brand religion” (Kunde 2000). Using a model of brand evolution, Kunde describes the weakest brands as those that are simply products – offerings without any values. These are followed by concept brands which engender greater customer involvement, followed by corporate concept brands which are seen as totally consistent. More involvement and stronger values produces brand culture. The final and, it could be argued, desired state is “brand religion” – where the customer sees the brand as a must and a belief. Kunde (2000) uses Harley Davidson as an example of this category. In Australia, the Holden brand also inspires this kind of intense loyalty amidst some of its more enthusiastic drivers and followers. It may be worth applying the concept of emotion to employer branding to nurses, given evidence that those considering nursing as a profession do so, not because of economic benefits such as pay,

but because of less tangible rewards (Nowak 2005). Keller's (2000) customer-based brand equity pyramid also echoes the concepts of religion or "love" with its highest point being resonance – or active, intense loyalty.

de Chernatony (2006) also acknowledged that functional values are less sustainable than emotional values (2006) and placed brand personality at the top of his brand pyramid. Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale – originally applied to products - has since been adapted by researchers interested in corporate personality (Davies et al. 2003) and employer branding (Lievens 2007). Lievens modified the original components of brand personality identified by Aaker (1997) as sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Lievens' (2007) factors are sincerity, cheerfulness, excitement, competence, prestige and ruggedness. While Aaker's (1997) scale was developed with rigour, there have been some academics who have questioned its generalisability. Davies et al (2003) developed the "seven pillars of corporate personality", using Aaker's (1997) scale as a base. The corporate personality scale encompasses the dimensions of agreeableness, enterprise, competence, chic, ruthlessness, machismo and informality.

Cross and Smith's (1995) hierarchy of bonding – another emotionally based concept - is useful when considering brand relationships (Duncan & Moriarty 1997) and, by extension, employer branding. The levels start with awareness and end with advocacy. The "five levels of bonding" model has echoes in the brand religion model (Kunde 2000) and the customer-based brand equity pyramid (Keller 2001). Another relationship and emotionally based approach to branding was developed by Fournier (1998) who identified six facets that help to assess the strength of the consumer-brand relationship. Fournier (1998) developed her metaphors based on personal relationships, and her research was through interviews with three women regarding product brands they used. The factors identified were as follows:

- The extent to which there is a strong affection (i.e. love and passion).

- The degree to which there is a connection with the person's self-concept (self connection).
- How much the brand has woven itself into the consumer's life (interdependence).
- Whether consumers would remain committed to the brand (commitment).
- The depth of familiarity with the brand's attributes (intimacy).
- The extent to which the brand has qualities expected from a friend (brand partner quality).

However, taking a step back and looking critically at the literature, it could be asked: can concepts such as advocacy and religion really be applied to branding when the object of the exercise is to sell more soap powder, motorbikes or breakfast cereal to customers or even promote a profit-making hospital to its employees and potential employees? This discomfort with branding and "spin" was explored by Boyle (2003) who discussed the drive for authenticity among (some) consumers and the rejection of the "fake, the virtual, the spun and the mass-produced" (Boyle 2003, p. 4).

The point is that whatever the marketeers say about brands being the new soul, no brand or company is going to be able to survive in this climate unless the gap between image and reality closes a little. Reputation just doesn't work unless it's real (Boyle 2003, p. 39).

Boyle (2003) went on to suggest that the way to make a company's values and reputation "real" is to make them arise from your employees while encouraging them to create and buy into these values and reputation. Boyle does not make it clear how employers should achieve this goal and his suggestion ties more to the concept of internal marketing (see section 2.3.1), where employees are viewed as a means to an end, that is, customer satisfaction.

In related literature, one of the pillars of reputation is seen as authenticity – "a state in which the internal identity of the company reflects positively the expectations of key stakeholders and the beliefs of these stakeholders about the company reflect accurately

the internally held identity” (Fombrun & van Riel 2004, p. 177). This circular, and perhaps difficult to decipher, definition does make the point that expectations should match “reality” but it does also seem to be assuming that there is one clear internally held identity (not different identities across and within organisational departments). The concept of reputation will be further explored in section 2.2.

2.1.8 Corporate Branding

In the previous section the concepts of brand and brand equity were explored and the duality of functionality and emotion were considered. The corporation increasingly has to manage itself – for all its stakeholders - as a brand (Olins 2002). However, while the theory and practice behind corporate brands are sometimes seen to be the same as product brands, there are fundamental differences (Balmer & Gray 2003). As has been discussed, the concept of branding originated with products – moved into services – and was initially only applied to the relationship between customers and sellers.

Marketing and branding’s evolution is discussed by Balmer and Greyser (2006) who plot the development from *product and manufacturing orientation* (“Can we make it?”) to *sales orientation* (Can we sell what we make?) to *marketing orientation* (Can we determine what consumers or a group of consumers want that we can make and sell profitably within our zones of skills?) to *relationship marketing orientation* (Can we generate continuing business via consumer/customer satisfaction with what and how we make, sell and service?). Finally they suggest a further stage of development is *corporate level marketing* which sees the corporation asking the question: “Can we, as an institution, have meaningful, positive and profitable bilateral on-going relationships with customers and other stakeholder groups and communities?” The corporate level marketing concept clearly has ties to the stakeholder and stakeholder relationship marketing literature discussed under section 2.3.

The concepts of the corporate brand, corporate reputation and corporate identity have risen as academic fields of study. A corporate brand is a projection of the amalgamated

values of a corporation that enable it to build coherent trusted relationships with stakeholders (de Chernatony 2006). Mitchell (1997) suggested that the move to corporate branding ties into the evolution from the industrial age, which stressed tangible assets, to the information age, which seeks to exploit intangibles such as ideas, knowledge and information. Like Balmer and Gray (2003), de Chernatony (2006) took the view that managing corporate brands requires a different approach to classic line (product) branding. Line branding was primarily focused on consumers and distributors whereas corporate branding is about multiple stakeholders interacting with many staff from numerous departments. In corporate branding, while values do come partly from corporate communications campaigns, stakeholders' interactions with staff are vitally important (de Chernatony 2006). He made the point that some of the world's best known corporate brands such as Virgin, Body Shop and Walt Disney were begun by entrepreneurs with a strong vision and personality who recruited staff with similar values to theirs. Echoing this view, Balmer and Gray (2003) suggested the key difference between product and corporate brands is that corporate brand values are usually grounded in the values and affinities of company founders, owners, management and personnel whereas product brand values tend to be contrived and produced by marketing and advertising departments. Corporate branding is seen as an important element of company strategy and therefore a senior management concern.

The critical role of employees in the corporate branding process is emphasised by a number of authors (Balmer & Gray 2003; Harris & de Chernatony 2001; Ind 1997). Ind argued that "people are the corporate brand" (1997). Balmer and Gray (2003) suggested that employees are crucially important in transmitting the corporate brand's values and provide the interface between the internal and external environments. They noted that the employees' importance has particular significance for the development of human resources in an organisation and the recruitment of personnel. It is Balmer and Gray's (2003) opinion, therefore, that human resource managers should occupy a position of importance in supporting the corporate brand.

2.2 The Reputational Dimensions of Employer Branding

The previous sections looked at the theoretical foundations of employer branding, the related notion of employer attractiveness and the key academic works on these specific areas. Branding, brand equity and corporate branding were also reviewed. The psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company should be a key area for review in any study of employer branding (Ambler & Barrow 1996). As has previously been alluded to in section 2.1.3, authors such as Backhaus (2004) have discussed social identity theory (SIT) and linked the concepts of corporate reputation to EB. In the next section it will be argued that SIT provides a theoretical justification for viewing corporate reputation and related concepts as facets of the psychological benefits dimension of employer branding.

2.2.1 Social Identity Theory

Several scholars have noted the importance of social identity theory (SIT) applied to recruitment and the employer branding process (Backhaus 2004; Backhaus, Stone & Heiner 2002; Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Cable & Graham 2000; Goldberg 2003; Turban & Greening 1997). The theory suggests that people derive their self worth at least in part from membership of certain groups (Tajfel 1982). Membership of an organisation will influence an individual's self concept. So "belonging" to an attractive employer would be seen as advantageous for a potential employee. Ashforth and Mael (1989) were the first to use SIT in terms of a person's identification with an organisation. People may be classified in various categories and people classify themselves according to what social groups they belong to, known as social classification. Social classification serves two functions. First it cognitively segments and orders the social environment. Second, social classification enables the individual to define him or herself in the social environment (Ashforth & Mael 1989). The individual's organisation may provide one answer to the question; Who am I (Ashforth & Mael 1989)? Individuals identify with social categories partly to enhance self esteem and through social identification and

comparison, individuals are argued to partake in the successes and status of the group. Hence organisations with a positive reputation would be perceived as a more attractive proposition for potential employees.

Ashforth and Mael (1989) apply SIT to organisations across three areas: organisational socialisation, role conflict and intergroup relations. Under the area of organisational socialisation, Ashforth and Mael (1989) contended that because identification is group specific, organisations make claims to be unique. They also suggest that this is why a search for a distinctive identity by managers induces organisations to focus intensely on symbols including: advertising, names and logos, jargon, leaders and mascots. Ashforth and Mael's (1989) emphasis on the organisational search for a point of difference, and its representation/manipulation through symbols including traditions, myths, metaphors, heroes and physical setting, is echoed in the literature on branding (discussed in the previous section). The link between symbolism and identification (Ashforth & Mael 1989) is also mirrored in the literature on corporate identity, discussed in section 2.2.2.

Role conflict explores the notion that, as most individuals belong to different groups, the different "social identities" that result from belonging to these groups could make inconsistent demands on a person. While most people slide easily from one role to another; when the disparities between roles are made obvious and a person is forced to "don two hats" the ease of cognitively managing two roles is broken down (Ashforth & Mael 1989). Ashforth and Mael use the example of the Challenger disaster where a senior engineer sent the shuttle into space, despite a faulty solid rocket booster, when he was asked to stop thinking like an engineer and think like a manager. Looking at hospital groups, nurses may find a potential role conflict in their dedication to patient care, as a member of the nursing profession, on the one hand, and as a nurse within a private hospital setting the opposing need for efficiency in nursing hours devoted to patients (known in the health industry as "hours per patient day") to increase revenue. Nurse managers, in particular, who are responsible for staffing, may face this difficulty in cognitively managing different group expectations. This concept of role conflict can

also be explored when a large proportion of nurses are part-time workers with family obligations.

A distinction is made between holographic organisations and ideographic organisations (Ashforth & Mael 1989). Holographic organisations have a purpose and identity that is common across departments whereas ideographic organisations have multiple identities across sub-units which may vie for power and status. It is suggested that in the ideographic organisation sub-units can be the primary focus of inter-group conflict. Ashforth and Mael (1989) quote a study of hospitals by Bates and White (1961) that sampled board members, administrators, doctors and nurses from 13 hospitals and found that each group believed it should have more authority than allowed.

Cable and Graham (2000) used SIT to as a basis to suggest that employees and applicants, because of their close affiliation or potential affiliation with an organisation, may have very different perceptions of reputation and reputational attributes than other stakeholders such as consumers or investors. Indeed, their empirical research supported this view (for a detailed discussion of Cable and Graham's work, see the following section). In summary, SIT is of particular use when looking at the area of employer branding as it explores the important role of identification with the employer by the job applicant or employee. It also has resonance with key ideas in the branding, reputation and identity literature.

2.2.2 Corporate Reputation and Identity

The psychological benefits of working for an organisation with a good reputation have been reviewed under the concept of Social Identity Theory. The concept of reputation management is an area seen as coming under the remit of public relations professionals and academics (Campbell, Herman & Noble 2006; Haywood 2005; Hutton et al. 2001; CIPR Careers & Education no date). However, it also has links to stakeholder theory, management and branding. Reputation is still a woolly concept (Davies et al. 2003).

Indeed authors such as Davies et al (2003) used the concepts of reputation and brand interchangeably. Dowling (2001) made the distinction between reputation and a powerful corporate brand, or super brand, but sees them as linked. He defined the corporate super-brand as the trust, confidence and support that flow from the perception of a corporate reputation. Reputation, according to Dowling (2001), comprises the attributed values (such as authenticity, honesty, responsibility and integrity) evoked from a corporate image. He suggested that corporate image is the global evaluation (comprised of a set of beliefs and feelings) a person has about an organisation. Dowling (2001) viewed corporate identity as the symbols and nomenclature an organisation uses to identify itself to people (such as the corporate name, logo, advertising slogan, livery etc).

Balmer & Grey (2003) took a very different view, suggesting that the corporate identity concept refers to the distinct attributes of an organisation and addresses the questions “what are we” and “who are we”. In a related article, Balmer (2001) actually was critical of the influence of graphic design and the visual side on the concept of corporate identity suggesting that it had a deleterious influence, leading to the domain being narrowly conceived. Alessandri (2001) made a useful contribution by noting these two seemingly disparate definitions in her review of the literature – identity as symbols and nomenclature or identity as the big picture suggested by Balmer - and suggesting that managers need both. Her view was that tactical definitions of identity, such as those posited by Dowling (2001) and often found in practitioner literature, provide little or no strategic foundation for corporate managers to consider when identity is a concern. However, high-level strategic definitions, offered by authors such as Balmer (2001), provided a nebulous view of the concept that provides little value to researchers attempting to measure or even observe the corporate identity of a corporation (Alessandri 2001). For this reason Alessandri offered a conceptual and operational definition. The conceptual definition is a “firm’s strategically planned and purposeful presentation of itself in order to gain a positive corporate image in the minds of the public. A corporate identity is established in order to gain a favourable corporate reputation over time” (Alessandri 2001, p. 177). The operational definition, according to

Alessandri, relates to all the “observable and measurable elements of a firm’s identity manifest in its comprehensive visual presentation of itself, including, but not limited to – its name, logo, colour palette and architecture. Corporate identity also includes the firm’s behaviour, including – but not limited to – its reception of employees, customers, shareholders and suppliers” (2001, p. 177). Alessandri (2001) went on to posit a model of corporate identity.

However, Alessandri’s model is weakened by her assertion that firms retain complete control of their identities, but have no control of their image (the public’s perception). The question could be raised: how can an organisation have complete control over its identity, including its public behaviour, when that behaviour is exhibited by employees who are human beings, not automatons? Davies and Chun (2002) made the distinction that identity is the perception of employees of the brand and image is the customer view. It should be noted that some authors view reputation as flowing from a corporate identity or image (Alessandri 2001; Dowling 2001) while others place the study of reputation as the top priority (Fombrun & van Riel 2004).

Charles Fombrun is a pioneer and leader in the field of “reputation management” as a discipline of its own. Fombrun, Gardberg and Server (2000), working with PR company Shandwick and Harris Interactive, developed the “reputation quotient”, a multi-dimensional measure of corporate reputation and defined corporate reputation as a “collective assessment of a company’s ability to provide valued outcomes to a representative group of stakeholders” (Fombrun, Gardberg & Sever 2000, p. 243). The reputation quotient (RQ) has six dimensions: financial performance, workplace environment, products and services, emotional appeal, social responsibility and vision and leadership. The RQ is the sum of the answers people give when they are asked 20 questions based on these six dimensions. Research has generally treated perceptions of reputation as constant across publics (Cable & Graham 2000). However, Cable and Graham (2000) pointed out that this runs counter to stakeholder theory which views corporations as constellations of competitive and co-operative interests. Managers must aim to create satisfaction among each distinct group (see section 2.3.2 for a detailed

discussion of the stakeholder perspective). Cable and Graham (2000) also used social identity theory to suggest that employees share an especially close affiliation with organisations and their criteria for evaluation of a reputation could be more related to their personal needs than other constituents such as consumers and investors (see section 2.2.1 for a detailed discussion of social identity theory).

2.2.3 Public Relations as Reputation Management

In the public relations world, Weber Shandwick Worldwide remains a network partner of the “Reputation Institute”. As discussed previously, it would appear that at least some sections of the public relations profession view reputation as the industry’s main sphere of influence. The British Chartered Institute of Public Relations offers this definition of its profession: “Public relations is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour” (*CIPR Careers & Education no date, n.d.*). Haywood (2005) argued that the most practical definition of public relations is that it is the management of corporate reputation and that reputation is an integral factor within the remit of public relations. Therefore, “reputation should be a public relations responsibility” (Haywood 2005, p. 17).

However, this conceptualisation of public relations management has been criticised on a number of grounds. In the public relations literature, Campbell, Herman and Noble (2006) used critical theory to question the ideas and assumptions underlying reputation management. They stated that reputation management can be seen as a metaphor masquerading as reality – appearing to be an explanation of what public relations is – but it is a term at war with itself (Campbell, Herman & Noble 2006). The authors suggested the term is a conscious denial of the purpose of public relations practice and that at a superficial level it denies the uncontrollability of reputation and at a deeper level claims to balance organisational interests with those of the publics. Using the perspective of the philosopher Foucault, the authors pointed to the centrality of power in

the discourse of all organisations and posit that reputation management can be seen as the attempt to exert power by influencing public opinion (Campbell, Herman & Noble 2006).

As discussed previously, Hutton et al (2001) also questioned the validity of reputation management as a guiding philosophy for public relations. They suggested that conceptually it is unclear whether reputation can be truly managed given that many scholars and practitioners believe that reputation is the outcome of all of an organisation's activities (Hutton et al. 2001, p. 256). Indeed, even Haywood (2005), a strong proponent of the public relations department being responsible for an organisation's reputation, admitted that how the organisation behaves is the critical factor in its stance to the public.

2.2.3.1 Reputation Measurement

Another criticism of the usefulness of public relations as reputation management is associated with the measurement of reputation. Reputex, another reputation measurement tool, uses a wide variety of "stakeholders" to gather its information – mostly those with little knowledge of the firm. Indeed, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry criticized the measurement tool, likening it to the voting system for Australian Idol (Hendy 2003). The problem with reputation measures such as the Reputation Quotient and Reputex, is that they rely on respondents with little or no involvement with the company. For example, Fombrun and van Riel's aim with the RQ is to record the perceptions of people who have a minimal level of familiarity with the companies they are asked to rate (Fombrun & van Riel 2004). Perceptions are likely to be based on general media coverage and hence can be highly volatile.

The difficulties associated with reputation as a useful measure for attracting and retaining employees is evidenced in Fombrun and van Riel's book (2004) which looks at "how successful companies build winning reputations". In Australia, in 2000, 1019 consumers were asked to nominate companies with the best and worst reputations.

Interestingly, the company that was seen as having the worst reputation, Telstra, also came out on top as the company with the *best* reputation. In fact, the Coles Myer Group, the Commonwealth Bank, BHP and AMP were all on both lists as having the best *and* worst reputations (Fombrun & van Riel 2004). Fombrun and van Riel make the strong point that visibility, particularly in the media, is a key driver in creating a positive reputation. “Simply put, the more familiar you are with the public, the better the public rates you” (Fombrun & van Riel 2004, p. 104). However, their assertion appears to be at odds with their own data which shows that, according to the surveys, in countries including Italy, Australia, the Netherlands and the US, the most highly visible companies actually also had highly negative reputations.

2.2.4 Reputation and its Effect on Employer Attractiveness

Several studies have explored the notion of employer reputation (e.g. Backhaus, Stone & Heiner 2002; Cable & Graham 2000; Schmidt & Freeman 2000; Turban, Forret & Hendrickson 1998; Turban & Greening 1997). Cable and Graham (2000) used three different methodologies to explore the factors that job seekers consider when evaluating employers’ reputations. It was found that individuals’ familiarity with the company was significantly related to their perceptions of companies’ reputations. Results also showed that an organisation’s industry and profitability were related to reputation. The authors concluded that given the large percentage of inconsistencies that were found in the investigation, future research could benefit by examining firms’ reputations from the perspective of different stakeholders and their individual concerns. One of the aims of this thesis on employer branding is to do just that. Two of the three studies conducted by Cable and Graham (2000) showed that both opportunities for development for employees and company culture were important in establishing reputation, but they were not found to significantly predict job seekers’ perceptions of reputations in one section of the study. The authors conceded that one of their study’s limitations is the nature of the surveyed population – college students. Cable and Graham (2000) concluded that job seekers’ reputation perceptions were based on different factors than those used by

company executives. They also suggested that future research looks at how and why criteria for reputation vary for different constituents.

2.2.4.1 Corporate Social Performance and its Effects on Employer Attractiveness

Linked to the corporate reputation concept and stakeholder theory research, corporate social performance is one area that has received sustained attention from various scholars interested in its effect on employer attractiveness. Corporate social performance (CSP) has been defined as “a business organisation’s configuration of principles of social responsibility, processes of responsiveness and policies, programs and observable outcomes as they relate to the firm’s social relationships (D Wood 1991, p. 693). Turban and Greening (1997) obtained independent ratings of CSP for companies and surveyed senior undergraduate business students to ascertain the attractiveness of the firms as employers. The results indicated that a firm’s CSP may provide a competitive advantage in attracting applicants.

CSP is a multidimensional construct. Noting this, Backhaus, Stone and Heiner (2002) sought to discover which CSP dimensions were considered most important by job seekers. Surveying business college students in the USA, they found that certain dimensions – environment, community relations, employee relations, diversity and product issues – are more important than other dimensions and have differing effects on prospective employees’ assessment of firms. Interestingly, they found that a poor record in certain areas had more of a negative effect while a positive record might add little. For example, firms with a poor environment record were likely to encounter hurdles in recruitment but having a strong environmental record added little to an organisation’s attractiveness. Similarly, demonstrating positive employee relations adds little, but having poor employee relations creates a negative recruitment image. If there are multiple weaknesses related to the different dimensions of CSP, there is a measurable image problem for the firm (Backhaus, Stone & Heiner 2002).

2.2.5 Summary

To recap, the definition of EB in terms of the functional, psychological and economic benefits (Ambler & Barrow 1996) provided a framework for this literature review. Social identity theory was offered as a way of understanding the psychological benefits offered by EB and the literature on corporate reputation and identity was discussed under psychological benefits. It was argued that corporate identity and reputation are closely aligned and fit together for discussion purposes as many authors use the concepts interchangeably. The literature on CSP, as a subset of reputation, related to employer attractiveness was also reviewed.

2.3 The Relationships Dimension of Employer Branding

It has been noted previously that Ambler and Barrow (1996) outlined three groups of concepts which are relevant to the EB concept: corporate culture and identity, internal marketing and corporate reputation and that EB represents a unique synthesis of all three concepts. In the light of this framework, a review of the literature of internal marketing will now be undertaken. It will be argued that internal marketing is a way of offering functional benefits to staff, though there is a psychological component. Relationship marketing (RM) and internal marketing (IM) have become somewhat intertwined (Barnes, Fox & Morris 2004; Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne 1991). Therefore, following a review of internal marketing, a discussion of relationship marketing will ensue. While internal marketing and relationship marketing have developed as fields of study in the marketing literature, simultaneously stakeholder theory has developed as a discipline, mostly in the management realm. More recently marketers have taken note of stakeholder theory and the concept of stakeholder relationship marketing has been advanced (Murphy et al. 2005). Public relations scholars have also developed their own literature related to relationships and stakeholder support. All these areas will be reviewed in turn.

2.3.1 Internal Marketing

Internal marketing (IM) is the successful hiring, training and motivating of able employees to serve the customer well (Kotler 1991). IM has evolved as a strategic tool for firms in order for them to create a sense of customer consciousness within their particular organisations (Barnes, Fox & Morris 2004). It has been suggested that internal marketing is more important than external marketing (Kotler 1991). It is interesting to note the almost manipulative intent behind the concept of IM – a point also made by Ambler and Barrow (1996) who suggested that some will reject its unidirectional nature. Employees are hired, trained and motivated with one purpose in mind – customer satisfaction. However, it could be argued that managers should embrace IM as a tool for improving customer service outcomes. For example, in an article specifically related to internal marketing and nursing homes, Cooper and Cronin (2000) suggested that IM was a competitive strategy and could achieve more than traditional marketing efforts, ie, positive word-of-mouth.

Hwang and Chi (2005) identified four different categories of internal marketing discussed in previous research. These four categories were: treating the employee as an internal customer; developing customer orientated behaviour amongst employees; an HRM orientation focused on training and human resource development; and an internal exchange approach proposing that efficient internal exchange relationships are the precursor for the achievement of external market objectives. Empirical research by Hwang and Chi (2005) of employees in international hotels in Taiwan found that internal marketing has positive impacts on employee job satisfaction and that employee job satisfaction and internal marketing both have positive impacts on the performance of an organisation.

Mitchell (2002) was in no doubt about the need for IM. “It is a truth of business that if employees do not care about the company, they will in the end contribute to its demise”

(2002, p. 11). He contended that internal marketing is the best way to help employees make powerful emotional connections to the products and services sold and that when people care about and believe in the brand, they're motivated to work harder and their loyalty to the company increases. Employees will be more likely to deliver on customer expectations and a successful internal branding campaign will help the company to achieve goals that may otherwise be out of reach.

2.3.2 Stakeholder Theory

It has also been argued that stakeholder theory is useful when discussing employer branding (Ewing et al. 2002) and that there is potential for fruitful cross-fertilization between the stakeholder and marketing literatures. In recent times scholars have explicitly linked branding and stakeholders (Gregory 2007; Meyers 2003; Roper & Davies 2007). In fact, it has been suggested that the term brand has undergone radical evolution to become “the interdependent living system of stakeholders” (Meyers 2003, p. 23). This perhaps grandiose definition of brand is expanded upon by Meyers who stated: “It’s our view that a brand, rather than being an object of exchange, can be viewed as the sum total of relationships among stakeholders, or the medium through which stakeholders interact with each other” (Meyers 2003, p. 23). Given recent focus on the links between stakeholders and branding, this section will discuss the origins of stakeholder theory, looking at definitions of who or what is a stakeholder, classifications of stakeholders, different typologies within the “stakeholder debate” and the network theory of stakeholder structures. Finally, “stakeholder relationship marketing” and the six markets model will be discussed (Murphy et al. 2005; Payne, Ballantyne & Christopher 2005).

Stakeholder theory emerged from the management discipline and initially developed in opposition to the idea that the shareholder was king. Freeman’s (1984) seminal work on stakeholder theory proposed this initial definition of a stakeholder: “A stakeholder in an organisation is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement

of the organization's objectives" (Freeman 1984 p. 25). Freeman's definition has become known as the "broad definition" as opposed to the more narrow, initial, Stanford Research Institute definition of "those groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist" (Freeman 1984, p. 31). While Freeman's definition has had its critics it is certainly well quoted. Clarkson (1995, p. 106), another influential stakeholder theorist, gave this even broader definition: "Stakeholders are persons or groups which have, or claim, ownership, rights or interests in a corporation and its activities, past, present or future. Such claimed rights or interests are the result of transactions with, or actions taken by, the corporation, and may be legal or moral, individual or collective. Stakeholders with similar interests, claims or rights can be classified as belonging to the same group: employees, shareholders, customers and so on." As de Bussy notes (2005), the stakeholder concept is "anything but value free" and has, from its very beginnings, eschewed the traditional notion of the business serving the shareholder or business owner alone.

It is interesting to note, given the focus on employees and potential employees of this thesis, that there has been little or no debate on the notion that employees are stakeholders (Ewing et al. 2002) – it is something with which everyone agrees. In all early classifications of stakeholder groups, employees were seen as vital. Clarkson (1995) discussed the 20th century big business approach to stakeholders in the USA, including the General Electric Company, which, in the 1930s, identified four major stakeholder groups as shareholders, employees, customers and the general public. Following World War II, Johnson and Johnson listed its stakeholders as customers, employees, managers and shareholders. However, in the general stakeholder literature, potential employees/job applicants are not given the same consideration. Donaldson and Preston (1995) acknowledged that potential job applicants are stakeholders, suggesting that while they are unknown to the firm, nevertheless they do have a stake in being considered for the job. However, Donaldson and Preston (1995) suggested that while job applicants may have a stake in a firm, they have no influence on the firm. This statement can be strongly disputed, particularly given the current skills shortage. For example, if a hospital does not have enough doctors or nurses (or indeed any other staff) to function

then it simply cannot operate. Attracting customers is not, therefore, the first priority. Attracting staff becomes paramount. Therefore a firm *must* expend resources on attracting and retaining employees - “employer branding”- and therefore potential job applicants do have a substantial influence on an organisation.

2.3.2.1 Stakeholder Classifications

Clarkson (1995) divided stakeholders by classifying them as primary or secondary stakeholder groups. He argued that primary stakeholders are those that need to participate with the corporation for its continued survival. He included shareholders and investors, employees, customers, and the “public stakeholder group” – a rather broad term covering governments and communities that provide infrastructure and markets. While not specifically mentioned by Clarkson, in looking at his classification, where would potential employees fit? It is suggested that they are a primary stakeholder group as they need to participate with the corporation for its continued survival. To put it simply, and has been argued in this thesis, a firm can not survive if it cannot attract potential employees to deliver its services.

2.3.2.2 Who Holds a Stake? A Question of Influence

Just as there have been varied definitions of “the stakeholder”, debate continues over how to identify a stakeholder and how important different stakeholder groups are to management. Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) addressed the quandary faced by managers as to which stakeholder deserves the most attention by proposing a “theory of stakeholder identification and salience”. The authors began with a comprehensive literature review of stakeholder theory which shows just how many definitions of stakeholder (27) had already been posited. They go on to single out three key attributes – power, legitimacy and urgency – as dimensions of stakeholder salience. *Power* is defined by the authors as the extent a party can gain access to “coercive utilitarian or normative means to impose its will on relationships”(R Mitchell, Agle & Wood 1997, p. 865). *Legitimacy*, it was acknowledged by the authors is often coupled with power, but

they proceed to insist that the concepts are separate. Their definition of legitimacy was “a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions”. *Urgency*, they suggested, refers to time sensitivity and “criticality” – “the degree to which stakeholder claims call for immediate attention” (R Mitchell, Agle & Wood 1997, p. 867). Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) described various classes of stakeholder, dependent on combinations of these three attributes, with their final proposition that managers will see stakeholder salience as high (i.e. definitive stakeholders) where all three of stakeholder attributes – power, legitimacy and urgency – are perceived by managers to be present (R Mitchell, Agle & Wood 1997, p. 878).

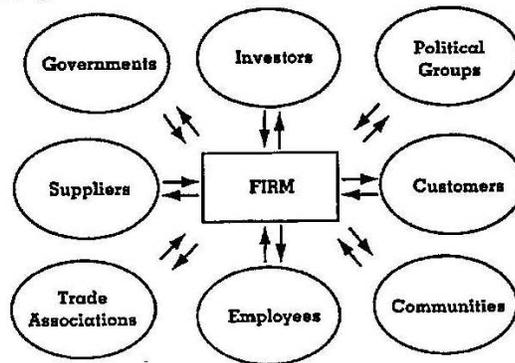
While Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) acknowledged the link between legitimacy and power, they have been criticised by other academics for not making more of the fact that power may come as a result of legitimacy, rather than being a separate construct. The complex notion of power, of course, has been given much attention in many fields of academic research. Power and its effect on relationships between stakeholders will be further discussed under the headings of public relations and relationship marketing. Applying Mitchell, Agle and Wood’s theory to employees and potential employees, and mindful of the work in sociology on power within the hospital setting (see section 1.5 in the introductory chapter) it could be argued that, within hospitals, employees and potential employees have always had power, legitimacy and urgency. Traditionally, it has been seen that doctors as a stakeholder group have had the *most* “power, legitimacy and urgency”. However, given the recent economic conditions, there has been an increase in the urgency for nursing and other staff. It could also be argued that the power and legitimacy of nurses (as employee and potential employee stakeholder groups) has, therefore, increased. Hence, so has their salience for hospital managers.

2.3.2.3 Descriptive, Instrumental and Normative Theories

Donaldson and Preston (1995) drew together the work on stakeholder theory up to that time and identified three aspects: descriptive, instrumental and normative. They

explained *descriptive* stakeholder theory as basically describing how a corporation deals with stakeholders. *Instrumental* theory is seen as the connection between how an organisation manages its stakeholders and the achievement of organisational goals. Finally, *normative* stakeholder theory accepts that stakeholders are identified by their interests in the company and that the interests of stakeholders are of intrinsic value. Normative stakeholder theory is interested in how a company *should* act towards its stakeholders. Donaldson and Preston (1995) are explicit as to which strand they feel is the most crucial to be studied – and followed – in business. “For these reasons we believe that the ultimate justification for the stakeholder theory is to be found in its normative base. The plain truth is that the most prominent alternative to the stakeholder theory (i.e. the management serving the shareowners theory) is morally untenable.” (Donaldson & Preston 1995, p. 87). Unions and others have argued for the morality of treating the stakeholder group of employees well, but, it could be said, managers have largely concentrated on the instrumental case for attracting and retaining staff and this has been echoed in the internal marketing literature, discussed in section 2.3.1. The instrumental argument has also been used by scholars interested in reputation who have put forward the business case for building a strong reputation (e.g. Fombrun & van Riel 2004).

Figure 2.3 The stakeholder model of the corporation, as proposed by Donaldson and Preston (2005).



Source: (Donaldson & Preston 1995, p. 86)

The initial definition, offered by Freeman, does cover the individual, but it is true to say that as stakeholder theory developed, the emphasis had been on collective groups. This can be exemplified in the stakeholder model of the corporation proposed by Donaldson and Preston (1995) (see above) which puts governments, investors, political groups, suppliers, customers, communities, employees and trade associations in their own circles, equidistant from the firm and showing two-way relationships. They contrast their model with the “Input Output” model, which they see as much less complex as it does not show the “two-way” nature of different relationships. In employer branding, it will be argued, it would extremely unwise to view “employees” and “potential employees” as two big, catch-all categories which would receive the same marketing communications offering the same employer branding benefits. For example, a current employee working as a cleaner and nearing retirement may have very different requirements than a freshly graduated nurse.

2.3.2.4 Beyond Dyadic Ties

It has been suggested that Donaldson and Preston’s stakeholder model is still too simplistic for the complexity of relationships both within and outside the corporation (Frooman 1999; Neville & Menguc 2006; Rowley 1997). Rowley (1997) used concepts

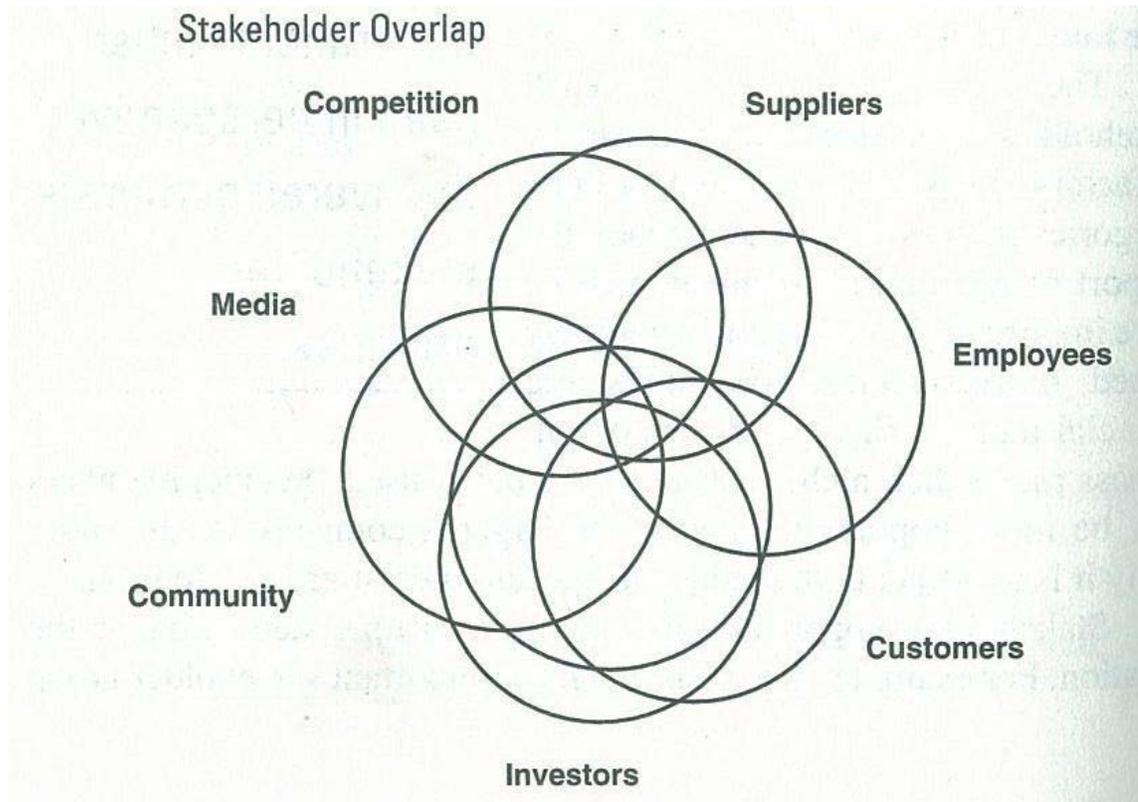
from social network analysis to examine characteristics of stakeholder structures. The purpose of network analysis is to examine relational systems which individuals inhabit – and the relational context is of utmost importance in understanding behaviours (Rowley 1997). He argued that, since stakeholder relationships do not occur in a vacuum of dyadic ties, but rather in a network of influences, then a firm’s stakeholders are likely to have relationships with each other. Rowley looked at how network density and the focal organisation’s centrality impact the organisation’s resistance to stakeholder pressures. When examining network density Rowley suggested that the more dense or interconnected a group of stakeholders is the more likely the group will be able to “constrain” the organisation. Interestingly, while Rowley was writing before the widespread use of the internet, this proposition certainly has relevance in relation to this communication medium (De Bussy, Ewing & Pitt 2003).

Rowley’s second proposition is that as the focal organisation’s centrality increases, its ability to resist stakeholder pressures increases. Rowley’s contribution is important as it acknowledges, first and foremost, the complexity of firm/stakeholder relations. Rowley’s contribution can certainly be analysed when looking at the difference in interconnectedness between potential employee groups in the healthcare sector – such as recent nursing or medical graduates (who may know each other well) and older applicants, who may not have such close social ties with other applicants. Also, the firm may be potentially playing a more central role with undergraduates, for example through “practicums” and with visits to university, than with the more disparate senior applicants.

Rowley’s premise is echoed by Duncan and Moriarty (1997), who suggest that “stakeholder overlap” should not be overlooked (see Figure 2.4, below). For example, an employee, such as a nurse, could be a shareholder, a local government official, a community neighbour of the organisation as well as a “customer” (patient) or close family member of a patient. As discussed earlier in this literature review, Duncan and Moriarty therefore suggest that, while different departments within a company may have

the day-to-day job of managing interactions and transaction, these must be integrated across departments.

Figure 2.4: Duncan and Moriarty's diagram of stakeholder overlap



Source: (Duncan & Moriarty 1997, p. 60)

In a practical approach, Gioia (1999) was critical of the academic approach which favours the normative view of stakeholder theory – arguing that it is an academic form of admonishing business akin to the “Just Say No” (to sex and drugs) campaigns aimed at teenagers and doesn’t hold much sway in the “real” management world. He suggested that much of what is written on stakeholder theory is not found credible by managers because it does not adequately represent the complex social, economic and organisational realities managers face (Gioia 1999). Gioia went on to exhort academics to “get off the veranda” by doing research and grounding stakeholder theory in more data. Clearly, this thesis will attempt to do as much.

McVea and Freeman (2005) went back to basics and suggested that academics and practitioners alike should, instead of lumping stakeholders into catch-all categories, come to see stakeholders as human beings with names, faces and families. “The opportunities for satisfying their individual needs, exploring their role relationships and determining how these can be better understood and fulfilled will open up a vast new space for value creation and trade (McVea & Freeman 2005, p. 67).”

2.3.3 Stakeholder Relationship Marketing

Recent literature has attempted to marry the concepts of stakeholder theory and relationship marketing. Murphy et al (2005) proposed the stakeholder relationship marketing model as a framework for measuring marketing performance in an holistic sense. Their definition is: “Stakeholder relationship marketing involves creating, maintaining and enhancing strong relationships with customer, employee, supplier, community and shareholder stakeholders of a business with the goal of delivering long-term economic, social and environmental value to all stakeholders in order to enhance sustainable business performance (Murphy et al. 2005, p.1049).” Murphy et al (2005) suggested that there are five key stakeholder groups – customers, employees, suppliers, community and shareholders - which have a vital stake in the operation of a business and they argued it is commonsense to see them as indispensable in the functioning of a sustainable business.

Payne, Ballantyne and Christopher (2005) developed the “six markets model”, which, addresses the complexity of stakeholder relationships and networks. The model identifies the following constituents:

- Customer markets – made up of buyers, intermediaries and final consumers.
- Referral markets, including customer and non-customer referral sources.
- Supplier and alliance markets.
- Influence markets.

- Recruitment markets – including all potential employees, together with third parties that service as access channels. They can be segmented by function, job role, geography and level of seniority.
- Internal markets – segmentation should be used along the lines of potential employees in the recruitment market (Payne, Ballantyne & Christopher 2005).

Payne, Ballantyne and Christopher (2005) suggested that relationship-based approaches to marketing would have an emphasis on stakeholder collaboration beyond the immediacy of market transactions. A planning framework was offered for stakeholder relationships. The six markets model is unusual within the stakeholder literature as it separates and places importance on recruitment markets as well as internal (employee) markets. Applying this model to a hospital, given the nature of this thesis, would see one important hospital stakeholder group – doctors – placed across most of the “six markets”. Doctors could be seen as referrers (referring patients), suppliers and alliance markets (supplying their services), influencers (through such organisations as the Royal Colleges and the AMA), recruitment markets and internal markets (though they are often not paid directly by the hospital they certainly work within the hospital setting with those on the hospital pay-roll). This model could be one way of explaining the relative power of doctors and their demand on senior management time, effort and resources as a group in contrast to other “recruitment” and “internal” markets, such as nurses, who do not fit across all categories.

2.3.4 Relationship Marketing

“The unit of business today and the coming years is no longer products but relationships” (Duncan & Moriarty 1997, p. 41). Prior to the emergence of “stakeholder relationship marketing”, the concept of “relationship marketing” as the new paradigm for marketers was also seen as a radical shift in thinking (Gronroos 1997). Gummesson (1994, p. 5) proposed this definition: “Relationship marketing (RM) is marketing seen as relationships, networks and interaction.” Gummesson, in an attempt to operationalize RM, suggested that RM needs a new type of organisation which requires a new type of management – away from the clearly defined traditional organisation - “the citadel”. Discussing this “imaginary organisation”, Gummesson used the metaphor of “amoeba-like” processes and structures. This ties into the concept of employer branding, which, we have seen, is clearly a cross-functional activity and this notion also is echoed in Duncan and Moriarty (1998), as discussed above. Gummesson opined: “Management must defend a new type of citadel which successively changes character and whose boundaries differ depending on which stakeholders look at the organisation.” Gummesson describes the 30 Rs – 30 relationships. Some of Gummesson’s 30 Rs can be seen as descriptions of stakeholders (for example R10 – relationships with the employee market or internal marketing), linking back to the stakeholder literature, while others are descriptions of relationship types or market phenomena.

Morgan and Hunt (1994) have theorised that successful relationship marketing requires relationship commitment and trust and that these are key moderating variables. Their definition of relationship marketing specifically acknowledges that many instances of relationship marketing do not have a “customer” as one of the exchange participants, noting that “strictly speaking, in strategic alliances between competitors, partnerships between firms and governments and internal marketing there are neither “buyers”, “customers” nor key accounts – only partners exchanging resources”. They propose the definition that: “Relationship marketing refers to all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges”. Morgan and

Hunt (1994) reject the thesis that power is the central concept of network analysis, preferring to accentuate the positive by looking at what distinguishes productive, effective relational exchanges. They define relationship commitment as “an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts to maintain it.” (R Morgan & Hunt 1994, p. 23). They conceptualise trust as existing when one partner has confidence in an exchange partner’s reliability and integrity (R Morgan & Hunt 1994, p. 23). Morgan and Hunt suggest five precursors of relationship commitment and trust. These are relationship termination costs and relationship benefits which directly influence commitment; shared values, which directly influence both commitment and trust; and communication and opportunistic behaviour which directly influence trust (and through trust, indirectly influence commitment). The outcomes of relationship and trust in a relationship (Morgan and Hung 1994) are more acquiescence (the degree to which a partner accepts or adheres to another’s specific requests or policies) and less propensity to leave; more functional conflict (fruitful disagreements which are resolved amicably) and less decision-making uncertainty and co-operation (working together to achieve mutual goals).

Linking theories and research from services and relationship marketing and branding - in particular Jan Carlzon’s “Moments of Truth” concept (Carlzon 1987) - Procter and Gamble has implemented the concept of “employee moments of truth”, with a branding campaign for its human resources in its beauty care business (Lawrence 2007). Carlzon’s concept relates to each time a customer comes into contact with an organisation. It is the accumulation of all these “moments of truth” – the contacts between employees and customers which, Carlzon suggested, determine whether an organisation succeeds or fails. Carlzon, the then President of Scandinavian Airline Services (SAS), said that moments of truth were the moments when SAS had to prove to its customers that SAS was their best alternative. Given the literature on relationship marketing, P&G did research and found that up to 2002, many of its HR services and products were impersonal. The objective of the campaign was to redesign the HR products and services to win at the moments of truth and achieve a breakthrough among employees – right through the company-employee relationship. Firstly, the critical

moments in the relationship were identified. The six critical stages were designated as: Joining, Onboarding, Developing, Contributing, Transitioning and Moving Beyond. The HR team had found that much of what had been offered previously did not leave potential employees and employees excited about the brand. P&G found that while the executions are different, there were several common characteristics of the brand equity of a product or service that worked with P&G's employees. The product or service offered to employees at different stages of their career had to be high quality and informative as well as being designed for that person, easily accessible, simple and engaging. As an example, when employees joined they were sent a guide called "FastStart" with simple tips for employees and a personal note from the head of Human Resources.

2.3.5 Public Relations Literature on Relationships

The previous section reviewed the literature in the marketing field on relationships. In the field of public relations, there has also been an increasing body of academic scholarship which views relationship management as the central concept for the profession – indeed, some, would argue that it has always been the core of what PR practitioners do (J.E. Grunig & Hon 1999; Hutton 1999; Ledingham 2003; Ledingham & Bruning 19982000).

Linked to the concept of a relationship-based approach to branding and marketing, the notion of dialogue as opposed to one-way communication is espoused by authors from stakeholder/management, marketing and public relations disciplines. Grunig and Hunt (1984), in *Managing Public Relations* developed the communication model of public relations which is divided into classifications of one-way and two-way communication. The *two-way symmetrical* communication is seen by Grunig and Hunt (1984) as the preferred model of communication, where consensus is achieved and mutual understanding between the organisation and its publics, or stakeholders, is the goal. Another public relations writer, Botan (1997), differentiates between monologic communication and dialogic communication which he suggested is both ethically and

practically superior to the former. Monologic communication is seen as more manipulative in nature. In a similar vein, but from the marketing perspective, Duncan and Moriarty (1997) highlight the difference between traditional marketing – which is focused primarily on sending messages – and integrated marketing, which supplements mass and niche media messages with purposeful dialogue.

Ledingham (2003) outlined a general theory of public relations as relationship management, identifying 11 dimensions of organisational-public relationships (trust, openness, credibility, emotion, intimacy, similarity, immediacy, agreement, accuracy, common interests and relational history). Grunig and Hon (1999) listed six elements or components of relationships: control mutuality, trust, commitment, satisfaction, exchange relationships and communal relationships. Grunig and Huang (2000) proposed that the first four distinguishable, yet intercorrelated, factors can be used to conceptualise and measure the quality of relationships between organisations and publics. It is interesting to note the authors conceded that all factors influence each other. The fact that a relationship can be viewed differently by both parties – as well as observers – points to the complexity of the construct.

Broom, Casey and Ritchey (2000, p. 18) proposed a summative definition of organisation-public relationships.

Organisation-public relationships are represented by the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange and linkage between an organisation and its publics. These relationships have properties that are distinct from the identities, attributes and perceptions of the individuals and social collectivities in the relationships. Though dynamic in nature, organization-public relationships can be described at a single point in time and tracked over time (Broom. Casey and Titchey 2000, p. 18).

It is worth noting that Hutton (1999) suggested strategic relationships should be seen as the dominant paradigm in the field of public relations and proposes the definition of

public relations as “managing strategic relationships.” Spencer (2005, p. 9) puts it succinctly, “reputation is a notoriously nebulous issue to tackle. But by focusing on stakeholder relationships, companies get closer to influencing perceptions and gauging how they contribute to organisational success”. Echoing these views, Phillips (2006) proposed that relationships are the core value for organisations.

One dimension of organisation-public relationships that has received considerable attention is trust (Chia 2005; Dimmick et al. 2000; Welch 2006). Grunig and Hon (1999) see trust as a critical element in relationships. As discussed earlier, in the relationship marketing literature and stakeholder literature trust is also seen as key (Jones 1995; R Morgan & Hunt 1994). More recently, Welch (2006) has looked at the concept of “distrust”, and suggests it should be added to Ledingham’s (2003) 11 dimensions of relationships and be conceptualized with trust as being simultaneously employed in a zone of approval.

If distrust has not yet been given sufficient attention, then it could be said that the construct of power may also have been glossed over (Campbell, Herman & Noble 2006). While Grunig and Huang (2000) do discuss the theoretical basis for power, they use the term “control mutuality” which could be seen as a euphemism and they conclude that for a stable, positive relationship, control mutuality among parties should exist *to some degree* [emphasis added]. However, the authors do not expand on to what degree this should be. In his qualitative research guide, Hackley (2003) suggested that it is increasingly common for interpretive approaches to research to be conducted with a critical focus on power and interest. “In micro-analysis of social life, researchers can look at how language and social practice confers power on individuals...Power is clearly important in many organisational contexts,” (Hackley 2003 p 106). Within this thesis the concept of power will be explored. For example, with the skills shortage, do nurses applying for positions perceive they have more power than the employer? Does this differ, depending on years of experience? Is trust or distrust of the employer applicable?

2.4 Chapter Summary

The chapter began with a review of the academic literature on employer branding and employer attractiveness. Ambler and Barrow's (1996) focus on the functional, emotional and psychological aspects of employer branding was used as a road map for the rest of the literature review. Hutton et al (2001)'s juxtaposition of relationship management and reputation management as guiding philosophies for corporate communication managers was used as springboard to review these dichotomous concepts. Under the heading of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) psychological benefits, social identity theory and corporate reputation and identity were reviewed. Under the heading of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) functional benefits, the complementary constructs of internal marketing, stakeholder theory, stakeholder relationship marketing and relationship marketing and management were explored. After reviewing past literature and research it becomes apparent that there is much potential for studying the interaction of corporate reputation, relationship marketing and stakeholder theory in the development of an employer brand. Relationships have been clearly identified in the literature as critical to successful internal marketing. There is also some evidence to suggest that corporate reputation may play a role in enhancing employer attractiveness. However, it appears no study of employer branding has as yet attempted to examine the interplay of reputation and relationships or to assess their relative importance to building employer brand equity.

2.5 Conclusion

Currently there is a small body of academic employer branding literature and the literature is, in the main, prescriptive and descriptive only. Two recent empirical studies (Knox & Freeman 2006; Lievens 2007) have noted the diversity of perceptions of an employer brand among different populations – recruits, employees and recruiters (see section 2.1.2 for a detailed discussion of these studies). However, these studies have tended to treat applicants as a single group and have not looked at the potential dissimilarities in image perceptions of different types of potential and actual applicants. Internally, employees have often been viewed and studied as a single, homogenous

group, rather than a heterogeneous sample, ignoring the SIT literature, which discusses the importance of sub-unit identification within organisations. Of the few empirical employer branding studies, most have used college students as the sample population for their research (Berthon, Ewing & Li 2005; Knox & Freeman 2006). Other related recruitment studies have also tended to use college students as their survey respondents (Aiman-Smith, Bauer & Cable 2001; Backhaus, Stone & Heiner 2002; Cable & Graham 2000; Gatewood, Gowan & Lautenschlager 1993).

This study should provide better theoretical understanding of corporate relationships, brand and reputation and the interplay between them. A detailed review of the extant literature has also yielded no investigation into the barriers to employer branding. This is a significant gap in the literature. In the following chapter the context of the study, the research problem and research questions will be outlined.

Chapter 3

Context and Research Problems to be Addressed

3.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter provides a context to the case study under consideration (Johns 2001), looking at the nursing profession including its current identity crisis (Scholes 2007) and painting a picture using statistics of the current state of the profession within Australia. The magnitude of healthcare spending and healthcare as a business in the Australian context is also reviewed. Having provided the context of the study, and with the literature review completed in Chapter 2, the research problems and objectives are detailed.

3.1 Context

Context is extremely important in a case-based study (Hartley 2004; Van Maanen 1979; Yin 2003) and no serious scholar has denied the impact of situations on behaviour (Johns 2001). Given that this research uses a case study approach, looking at employer branding to nurses within Western Australia (WA), it is therefore important to look at the current context of nursing employment within Australia. Context can serve as a main effect on organisational behaviour and/or a moderator of relationships at another unit or level of analysis (Johns 2001). The following section provides some of the current issues faced by the profession as well as some of the statistical background on the nursing workforce. The business of healthcare is also briefly reviewed.

Before discussing nursing as a profession it is important to understand the conditions under which nurses operate and the different levels and terminology within nursing. In Western Australia, The Nurses and Midwives Board of Western Australia functions in accordance with the Nurses and Midwives Act of 2006. The Board's role is:

- to advise the Minister on matters to which this Act applies

- to administer the scheme of registration
- to facilitate and promote public education and research in relation to the practice of nursing and midwifery
- to monitor education in nursing and midwifery, and provide advice on that education to the Minister and to any person or body involved in that education
- to promote and encourage the continuing education of nurses and midwives in the practice of their professions; and increased levels of skill, knowledge and competence in the practice of nursing and midwifery
- and to perform other functions that are conferred on the Board under this Act or any other Act (Nurses and Midwives Board of Western Australia 2008).

Nurses have different titles in different states of Australia and across the world (RPH Nursing - the career of a lifetime 2008). In Western Australia, the following titles are used: graduate enrolled nurse, enrolled nurse, graduate registered nurse, registered nurse, clinical nurse, clinical nurse manager, clinical nurse specialist, clinical nurse consultant, nurse manager, nursing director. The following definitions, relevant to this thesis, are taken from major Western Australian public hospital Royal Perth Hospital's recruitment website, RPH Nursing – the career of a lifetime. The different titles and levels of nursing show the hierarchical and highly regulated nature of the profession.

A *graduate enrolled nurse* (EN) has completed an 18-month certificate qualification at a "TAFE" (technical and further education institution) and is eligible for registration with the Nurses and Midwives Board of Western Australia. After this training the "graduate EN" undertakes a paid graduate program at a hospital and becomes an EN. *Enrolled nurses* retain responsibility for their personal actions while remaining accountable to the registered nurse for all delegated functions. *Registered nurses* (RNs) undertake degree level training for three or three and a half years at a university. On completion of this training the RN is eligible for registration with the Nurses and Midwives Board. In collaboration with the clinical nurse (CN), the graduate RN is responsible for the

delivery of a safe standard of nursing care. Once a graduate RN undertakes a first year clinical development program within a hospital setting, they are known as a registered nurse (RN) (RPH Nursing - the career of a lifetime 2008).

All positions above Registered Nurse (Level 1) are considered promotional RN positions. Applications for these positions can only be made in response to advertised vacancies. The clinical nurse (CN) is responsible for the quality of patient care delivered and the standard of nursing practice in an assigned ward/unit. A nurse manager is responsible for developing policies and standards to provide sound nursing human resource management practices within a hospital. He or she is also responsible for the management of nursing staff. A clinical nurse manager (CNM) is responsible for the management and standards of clinical nursing practice, patient care delivery and the management of human and material resources and budgetary monitoring within an assigned area of specialty (RPH Nursing - the career of a lifetime 2008).

All of these different levels of nursing have different pay points. Nursing pay is heavily influenced by the collective bargaining of two key unions – the Australian Nursing Federation (which works on behalf of registered nurses) and the Enrolled Nurse Association, a section of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (LHMU). In recent times the structure of nursing has been further complicated with the introduction of *nurse practitioners*. The emerging role of nurse practitioners is beyond the scope of this study. Nurse practitioners are not yet employed in the case hospital under study.

The contemporary healthcare context is a challenging one for nurses (Scholes 2007) and their practice of nursing. This has resulted in a crisis in ideology and a professional identity crisis (Scholes 2007). Scholes (2007) outlined four major factors contributing to the role strain and identity crisis within nursing: unrealistic expectations about the realities of the job; lack of appropriate skills and knowledge to do the job; lack of emotional preparation and self understanding to meet up to the demands of the job; and lack of support to facilitate the adaptive demands to meet all of the above. There is a worldwide shortage of nurses in critical care with recruitment and retention a major

problem (Newman, Maylor & Chansarkar 2001; O'Leary 2008; Preston 2005; Scholes 2007).

Nursing is clearly a highly feminised profession with 91 per cent of nurses in Australia being female in 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Selected Health Occupations: Australia 2006, Catalogue No. 4819.0 2008). In 2006, the proportion of nurses who worked part-time was 49 per cent, reflecting the number of females working as nurses (as more women tend to work part time, largely due to care of dependents primarily being a female activity). This compared to the situation in 1981 when two thirds (64.3 per cent) worked 35 hours or more per week. So there has been a significant fall in the number of RNs employed full-time. However, though a large proportion of RNs are employed part-time, the part-timers supply a relatively large number of hours – with the average RN employed part-time working 25 hours in 2002 (Preston 2005). In Preston's 2002 Western Australian RN survey, half (48.1 per cent) of the practising RNs that were employed full-time indicated they would like to work less hours. Within this group, of those who have a spouse or partner, nearly half have a spouse/partner who wants them to work fewer hours. An Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003 survey found that 67 per cent of nurses worked shifts in the previous four weeks, compared to 16 per cent of the population.

In 2001 the mean weekly income for a RN employed full time was \$833, or 82.2 per cent, of the mean weekly income for the average professional employee in full-time work. In addition, the relative pay position of RNs appears to be in decline compared to other professions (Preston 2005). Experience and tertiary qualifications for many RNs have not translated into significant career advancement or more pay. According to the 2002 WA RN survey, nurses perceived their profession as underpaid. Overall, nearly half (49.4 per cent) of all practicing RNs reported were dissatisfied (fairly or very) with their pay as a nurse. It was also apparent that dissatisfaction is greater among younger nurses, with 54.9 per cent of RNs aged 21-34 dissatisfied with their pay (Preston 2005).

While ABS figures show that 58.7 per cent of nurses are married, in the 2002 survey of WA RNs, 73 per cent of respondents said they had children and 58 per cent had dependant children (Preston 2005). A major area of concern was the number of nurses in the 2002 survey who said they would be leaving the profession soon. However, recent statistics show that the expected shortfall appears to have been made up with overseas nurses as in 2006, 5 per cent of all nurses were “recent arrivals” and 27.3 per cent were born overseas, compared to 2.2 per cent being recent arrivals in 1996 and 24 per cent being born overseas (*Australian Bureau of Statistics, Selected Health Occupations: Australia 2006, Catalogue No. 4819.0* 2008).

Between 1986 and 2001, there was a 22 per cent decrease in nurses employed in aged care and an 8 per cent decrease in nurses employed in hospitals (*Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Social Trends, Catalogue No. 4120, 2005, Paid Work: Nursing workers* 2005). In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s nursing grew at half the rate of all occupations (*Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Social Trends, Catalogue No. 4120, 2005, Paid Work: Nursing workers* 2005). Australia’s aging population is felt sharply in the nursing sector. In 2001, census data showed 40 per cent of all nurses were aged 45 years and over.

In healthcare the division of labour is hierarchical and doctors are usually the most rewarded by financial remuneration and social status of all health occupations. The gender division in the health sector is illustrated by the disparity between male and female average weekly earnings being greatest in the health professions (Wearing 2004). In 2002, male and female average weekly incomes in the health and community service industries that include doctors were \$975 and \$762 respectively ('Employer earnings and hours, 2002' 2003). As discussed briefly in Chapter 1, the nursing profession presents a picture of a highly feminised workforce, with many part-time workers receiving a relatively low rate of pay.

In Australia, health care is big business with costs for healthcare continuing to rise (Trewin 2005). Total health expenditure in 2002-03 was \$72.2 billion, compared with

expenditure of \$66.5 billion in the previous year. Health expenditure grew at an annual rate of 4.5 per cent between 1992-3 and 2002-3. In 2002-03 total health expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product was 9.5 per cent compared with 8.9 per cent in 1992-93 (Trewin 2005). There were 536 private hospitals in operation in 2002-03. Total operating expenditure for private acute and psychiatric hospitals during 2002-03 amounted to \$5,147 million and of this 53 per cent was spent on wages with 63 per cent of the staff being nursing staff (Trewin 2005). Clearly, then, healthcare and nursing are significant areas of the economy in Australia (and across the world) and warrant attention.

The case hospital under question is part of a publicly listed Australian company, the largest private hospital group in Australia. The hospital has 474 beds for in-patients and day stays and provides comprehensive care for private patients, including the privately insured, entitled veterans and war widow/ers and self-insured patients. The hospital, which has more than 1000 staff, provides in-patient and day patient care in the areas of surgery, medicine, psychiatric care, rehabilitation and palliative care, and is accredited with the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards. The hospital is currently undergoing major redevelopment. Researchers need to be sensitive to time and timing (Johns 2001). As has been discussed previously, the timing of the case (2006-2008) was during an acute skills shortage across all sectors, but particularly nursing, and so provided an extreme case (Yin 2003) for the study of employer branding.

3.2 Research Problems

A problem can be defined as any situation where a gap exists between the actual and ideal state and a problem statement as a “clear, precise and succinct statement of the question or issue that is to be investigated with the goal of finding an answer or solution” (Sekaran 2003, p. 70). Based on the literature introduced in section 1.1 (and discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2), gaps have been identified in terms of empirical, contextual studies in the employer branding literature. As has been noted, this thesis takes a case study approach, looking at employer branding to nurses in a private hospital

within Western Australia. Thus the research problems examined in this thesis are as follows:

1. Is employer attractiveness more influenced by a company's relationships or its reputation?
2. Do perceptions of employer attractiveness in the health industry differ between nurses at different levels of their career – undergraduate, early career, mid-career and at senior levels?
3. What are the barriers to implementing the employer branding/attractiveness concept in the health industry?

3.3 Research Objectives

The primary purpose of this thesis is to provide an in-depth, contextual review of employer branding in action and the constraints organisations face in developing a strong employer brand. The specific research objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify which is more important in influencing a company's employer brand – its reputation or relationships
2. To analyse the perceptions of employer branding for nurses at different levels of their career.
3. To identify the barriers to implementing the employer branding/attractiveness concept in the health industry.

3.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the context of the study, the research problems and the research objectives, based on the gaps in the literature addressed in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 will outline the methodological framework of the study and give specific details of the researcher's modus operandi.

Chapter 4

Research Methodology

4.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the paradigm of choice informing the methodological framework and a justification of the methodology employed in the research. The type of investigation used and the unit of analysis are discussed; details of the research design and ethical considerations are also presented. The chapter provides an overall explanation of the methodology and discusses its application to the research findings presented in Chapter 5.

4.1 Introduction

This section represents a brief synopsis of the study's approach and a description of the participants. This is presented in order to provide a context for discussion regarding conceptual issues, the paradigm of the research, methodology and data collection and analysis. The study uses a single case study approach investigating a large, for-profit private hospital within Australia and focusing on the nursing profession. However, as the case study is looking at employer branding, the research does go "beyond" the case, exploring the views of potential graduate applicants for the hospital. The case study incorporates qualitative data from in-depth interviews and focus groups with nursing employees, managers and directors at different hierarchical and experiential levels within the organisation and prospective nursing employees outside the organisation as well as doctors, who are not directly employed by the organisation but do work within it and other hospitals. A table of all interviews is presented under section 4.4. As well as in-depth interviews and focus groups, qualitative analysis of documentary evidence (including a survey conducted by the organisation, internal documents and external promotional material such as the company website and brochures) has been conducted in order to triangulate the data (Yin 2003). This chapter covers each facet of the research

methodology from the rationale for choice of design and approach through to the data collection and analytical approaches adopted.

4.2 A Justification of the Approach

No construction is or can be incontrovertibly right; advocates of any particular construction must rely on persuasiveness and utility rather than proof in arguing their position (Guba & Lincoln 1994, p. 108).

With any study there is a need for the researcher to justify their approach. It could be argued that this seems to be even more important when the study is a qualitative one. Perhaps this is because of the fact that, according to Daymon & Holloway (2002), the realist or positivist worldview has dominated the field of marketing and public relations knowledge for so long. The arguments and political turf-wars over different methodologies and philosophies within academic circles are something of a shock to the novice researcher. For example, in the first issue of *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Cassell and Symon (2006) title their editorial “Taking qualitative methods in organisation and management research seriously.” A title such as this begs the question – is qualitative research currently viewed in a serious light? Cassell and Symon (2006) noted that research using qualitative methods is still under-represented in the top journals in the field – indeed they describe it as “invisible”. Their journal is an attempt to change this and their approach is that qualitative research is “intrinsically credible, valuable and a worthy and insightful endeavour” (Cassell & Symon 2006, p. 5).

Other authors have also suggested that a qualitative approach is useful, indeed imperative, particularly in the marketing field. There is a present over-emphasis on quantitative techniques to approach beliefs, perceptions and values at the heart of marketing (Schoenfelder & Harris 2004). It is argued that quantitative methods are not suited nor are they adequate to gain the depth of insight managers need to develop and maintain strong brands (Schoenfelder & Harris 2004). While qualitative research is not

without its detractors, the ambivalence towards it is diminishing as marketing communication shifts in its focus towards collaborative dialogue (Daymon & Holloway 2002).

Within the qualitative domain, case study research provides the researcher with an input of real-world data from which concepts can be formed and propositions and theories can be developed (Eisenhardt 1989; Guba & Lincoln 1994). Ewing et al (2002) argued that case-base studies would add considerable value in the study of the concept of employment brands and employment brand equity. They also suggested that future research would need to study employers and their efforts to shape employment brand value. Such research would probably have to solicit the perceptions of various individuals within an organisation (for example, key decision makers in the areas of marketing management, human resources and public relations) (Ewing et al. 2002). In a later article, it is also suggested that it would be useful to discover the perceptions of final-year students about to graduate and begin employment (Berthon, Ewing & Li 2005). These recommendations have been adopted in this research.

The inappropriateness of the positivistic research paradigm in the initial stage of theory generation related to corporate identity was discussed by Balmer (2001). Balmer argued that marketing scholars should give a greater emphasis to qualitative and case study research, particularly in the area of corporate identity and corporate branding. Case studies can also be useful with regard to theory building research in the field of corporate identity (Balmer 2001). As scholars have begun to appreciate the role of dynamic processes, rich longitudinal research is needed to provide details of how these processes play out (Siggelkow 2002; 2007).

It has been proposed that the use of a qualitative methodology is an appropriate methodology for examining complex research areas. As outlined in the literature review, employer branding is seen as a complex, cross-disciplinary field and the use of an interpretive approach seems appropriate. In a paper which brings together the concepts of social, organisational and corporate identity, Cornelissen, Haslam and Balmer (2007) argued that future research on these interlinked areas needs to connect observations of

structural or macro-level phenomena with micro-level analysis of process. In the same special issue of the *British Journal of Management* on corporate identity, Lievens, Van Hoye and Anseel (2007) discussed their quantitative study on employer image and identity. However, they suggested the questionnaire-based method they adopted may be less appropriate than qualitatively oriented methods to uncover the complex relationships between identity and image.

4.3 Qualitative Research: A Brief Overview

As has been discussed, several authors have called for more qualitative and case-based research in the areas of marketing, branding and corporate identity in general and employer branding in particular. However, in order to understand the reasons behind this, it is important to have a clear understanding of the differences between qualitative and quantitative philosophies and the relative strengths and weaknesses of the qualitative and case-based approaches. Therefore, this next section will provide definitions of qualitative research and outline its key characteristics.

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible...qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p. 3).

As we have seen, the two broad contrasting approaches to research are generally represented as qualitative and quantitative. Indeed, the dichotomy between the two has become something of a caricature (Yin 1993). While many authors use the terms qualitative and quantitative research to differentiate between the two main paradigms of research, the “opposing” philosophies can also be labelled as phenomenological and positivist (Hussey & Hussey 1997). However, it is recognized that these are the two extremes and very few people would operate within their pure forms (Hussey & Hussey 1997). The positivist view, generally associated with quantitative research, is based on the approach used in the natural sciences and seeks the facts or causes of social

phenomena with little regard to the subjective state of the individual. According to positivists, laws provide the basis for explanation, permit the anticipation of phenomena, predict their occurrence and allow them to be controlled (Hussey & Hussey 1997). The phenomenological paradigm, generally associated with qualitative research, is concerned with understanding human behaviour from the participant's own frame of reference. A reaction to the positivistic paradigm, it is assumed that social reality is within all of us. The qualitative approach stresses the subjective aspects of human activity by focusing on the meaning rather than the measurement of social phenomena (Hussey & Hussey 1997, p. 53).

Rather than phenomenological versus positivist approaches, Daymon and Holloway (2002) used the terminologies interpretive versus realist. Qualitative research methods are linked – indeed often seen as inseparable from – the interpretive, constructivist worldview (Daymon & Holloway 2002). Interpretive researchers do not believe in a “given” social reality but draw on the concept of social constructivism, that is the idea that social reality is a construction, built up from our interactions with those around us and our shared history (Daymon & Holloway 2002). The interpretivist approach allows the focus of the research to be on understanding what is happening in any given context. It includes consideration of multiple realities, different actors' perspectives and researcher involvement, taking account of the contexts of the phenomena under study (Daymon & Holloway 2002).

At its most simplistic qualitative research is based on words, rather than numbers (Daymon & Holloway 2002). While this is a seemingly basic observation, it is an important one as language and words are prerequisites for social life (Gummesson 2003). As the core of this study is regarding a social practice within a business setting, there is a necessary focus on words. Other core characteristics of qualitative research include:

- Natural settings. Qualitative investigations tend to take place in the research subjects' natural environments – such as their workplace, home or where they

shop (Creswell 2003; Daymon & Holloway 2002; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe 1991; Hussey & Hussey 1997).

- Researcher involvement. The researcher is closely involved with the people being studied – rather than being removed as is the case for quantitative researchers who tend to base methods on surveys or tightly structured interviews. The researcher systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry, is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study and articulates this (Creswell 2003; Daymon & Holloway 2002; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe 1991).
- Small-scale studies. Qualitative researchers are interested in deep exploration in order to provide rich, holistic description. Small samples are therefore more usual – investigated in-depth and over time (Creswell 2003; Daymon & Holloway 2002; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe 1991; Hussey & Hussey 1997).
- Holistic focus. Rather than directing their attention to one or two isolated variables, qualitative researchers are interested in a wide range of interconnected activities, experiences, beliefs and values (Creswell 2003; Daymon & Holloway 2002).
- Flexible. Although researchers have a topic and an agenda as a basis for their research, they are often open to explore new avenues of research that may arise during the research process. It is emergent rather than tightly prefigured. The research questions may change and be refined as the inquirer learns what to ask and to whom it should be asked (Creswell 2003; Daymon & Holloway 2002).

- It is fundamentally interpretive. The researcher makes an interpretation of the data, including developing a description of an individual or setting. The personal interpretation brought to qualitative data analysis cannot be escaped (Creswell 2003).

4.3.1 The Question of Paradigm

However, Creswell suggested that the situation today is less quantitative versus qualitative and more how research practices lie somewhere on a continuum between the two (Creswell 2003). Indeed, the use of mixed method approaches is becoming more popular with researchers (Creswell 2003). Whatever approach is chosen, it is argued that questions of methods are secondary to questions of paradigm (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Paradigm refers to the progress of scientific practice based on people's philosophies and assumptions about the world and the nature of knowledge (Hussey & Hussey 1997); a paradigm represents the worldview of the researcher (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Paradigms are "universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners" (Kuhn 1962, p. viii). Guba and Lincoln outlined the four basic beliefs of alternative inquiry paradigms. Their table is reprinted below.

Item	Positivism	Postpositivism	Critical theory et al	Constructivism
Ontology	Naïve realism – “real” reality	Critical realism – real reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically Apprehendable	historical realism – virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values; crystallized over time	relativism - local and specific constructed realities
Epistemology	Dualist/objectivist; Finding true	Modified dualist/objectivist; critical tradition/community; findings probably true	transactional/subjectivist; value-mediated findings	transactional/subjectivist; created findings
Methodology	Experimental/manipulative; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods	Modified experimental/manipulative; critical multiplism; falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods	dialogic/dialectical	hermeneutical/dialectical

Table 4.1: Basic beliefs (metaphysics) of alternative enquiry paradigms.

Source: Guba, EG & Lincoln, YS 1994, 'Competing paradigms in qualitative research', in NK Denzin & YS Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, Sage Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks, pp. 105-117.

Looking at this table, it is proposed that this study is based closer to the constructivism “side”. In a constructivist study such as this, the aim of the inquiry is understanding and reconstruction of constructions that people hold (Guba & Lincoln 1994). As this study concentrates on perceptions of employer branding amongst different individuals and groups within the social setting of a hospital, it would be naive to assert that there is one apprehendable and “true” reality. Looking at the ontological belief related to this study (i.e. the nature of reality), it would be argued that the every day practices within a hospital setting have certainly been shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values – but there are also local and specific constructed realities.

The epistemology of a study refers to “the relationship of between the knower or would-be-knower and what can be known” (Guba & Lincoln 1994, p. 108). In other words, if the investigator believes in an objective reality, then they will take a different approach to ensure their study is completely “objective”. The researchers will have the mindset of

distancing themselves from the data. In the current study, the investigator and investigated are interactively linked. It is impossible to investigate a practice and concept such as employer branding using a case study approach without forming a relationship with those people interviewed and “investigated”. What can be known is inextricably linked with the interaction between a *particular* investigator and a particular group (Guba & Lincoln 1994).

Finally, the question of methodology represented in the table refers to how the would-be knower goes about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known (Guba & Lincoln 1994). A constructivist approach is transactional, that is, there is a process of creation of “findings” as the investigation proceeds. The current inquiry is certainly transactional and requires a dialogue between the investigator and subjects of the inquiry. While findings are interpreted by the investigator, reference is also made back to the interviewees – know as “member checking” under a case study methodology (Yin 2003) and seen as an important way of verifying results (Carson et al. 2001).

While this study is skewed towards constructivism, the author acknowledges the value of other ontologies in research and does not denigrate these but considers constructivism the most appropriate approach for this study. The author also acknowledges that there are limitations with any methodology. The concept of a continuum or spectrum of approaches (Carson et al. 2001; Creswell 2003), rather than an “either/or” methodology shows that research does not stand in isolation and is, indeed, influenced and motivated by the great researchers stretching back through time and ontologies.

As has been discussed, the focus of this study is qualitative in nature as it attempts to understand a social phenomenon from the perspective of people at different hierarchical levels within and outside an organisation as well as across departments. The relatively unstructured nature of questioning of participants in a natural setting allows respondents to communicate their real agendas instead of merely responding to a narrow base of questioning that is typical of quantitative surveys. At such an early stage of development of employer branding theory, the adoption of a quantitative “from the outside” research

paradigm, it is argued, is not perhaps the most appropriate framework to understand the employer branding process within an organisation. In contrast, enquiry from the inside takes the view that “the researcher can best come to know the reality of a situation by being there, by being immersed in the stream of events and activities (Evered & Louis 1991, p. 11).” The phenomenon of employer branding is embedded in the minds of organisational members and potential organisational members and therefore, it is argued, requires an interpretive approach to the study.

In summary, thus far the arguments for the approach used have been outlined, the nature of qualitative research has been discussed and the particular positioning on the paradigm spectrum for this study has been given consideration. It has been shown that while there are many different arguments and discussions over research methodology, finally a choice has to be made. Pulling it all together, the novice researcher turns to metaphor for inspiration. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) used the metaphors of quiltmaker and filmmaker to describe the work of a qualitative researcher. The concept of quilting or “bricolage” is explained as a piecing together a set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation. Borrowing from film-making terminology, Denzin and Lincoln suggested that qualitative researchers use a form of “montage”. Montage uses brief images to create a clearly defined set of urgency and complexity.

The product of the interpretive bricoleur’s labor is a complex, quilt-like bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage – a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations. This interpretive structure is like a quilt, a performance text, a sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p. 6).

4.3.2 The Case Study as a Method of Inquiry

As has been discussed, this study requires a qualitative approach, based on the constructivist paradigm. The decision to use a case study method within this approach is based on the fact that little research has been conducted into employer branding within the Australian context. While the skills shortage in healthcare is felt across the globe, Australia has been particularly affected and continues to be so even following the recent

economic downturn (O'Leary 2008). An in-depth look at the context of the case was discussed in Chapter 3. A case study method would be used when the researcher wishes to deliberately include the context of the research, considering it to be of great significance and relevance to the phenomena being investigated (Yin 2003). The case study is a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings (Eisenhardt 1989; Siggelkow 2007).

“The purpose of case study research is usually systematic and holistic, to give a full and rich account of a network of relationships between a host of events and factors (Gummesson 2003).” A case study is bound by time and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures (Stake 2000). This case study began in 2006 and ended in 2008. It followed an evolution of the employer branding process within the organisation and concluded just as the organisation was rolling out major recruitment initiatives, including a stand-alone recruitment website and billboard advertising. Hartley (2004) offered several rationales for when case studies can be appropriate and useful. Case studies are useful where it is important to understand how the organisational and environmental context is having an impact on or influencing social processes. Case studies can be appropriate for exploring new or emerging processes or behaviours. In this sense, case studies have an important function in generating hypotheses and building theory (Hartley 2004). Case studies can be used to capture the emergent and changing properties of life in organisations. A survey may be too static to capture the ebb and flow of organisational activity, especially where it is changing very fast. Case studies can be useful for understanding everyday practices and their meanings to those involved, which may not be revealed in brief contact (Hartley 2004).

According to Yin, there are five rationales for conducting a single case study (2003). A *critical* case can be used to test a well formulated theory. A second rationale is when the case represents a *unique* or extreme case. In contrast a third rationale is when the case is *typical* or representative (Yin 2003). The fourth rationale for the single case study, and one that is proposed here, is that it is a *revelatory* case; the investigator has an

opportunity to observe and analyse a phenomenon previously inaccessible (Yin 2003, p. 42). The fifth rationale for a single case study is that it is longitudinal – studying the same single case at two or more different points of time.

The most important application for case studies is to explain the presumed causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for survey or experimental strategies (Yin 2003, p. 15). Case study enquiries enable the collection of rich, detailed information across a wide range of dimensions about one particular case.

Stake (2000) identified three types of case studies, although he conceded that reports (and authors) do not always fit neatly into one category. The three types of cases are intrinsic case studies, instrumental case studies and collective case studies (Stake 2000). Intrinsic case studies are significant because the case itself is of interest. Instrumental case studies are examined to provide insight into an issue or to draw a generalization. The case plays a supportive role to facilitate understanding of wider interest. A collective case study has less intrinsic interest in one particular case – it is an instrumental study extended to several cases (Stake 2000).

This case is seen as *revelatory* (Yin 2003) because the researcher has been allowed access to the depth and breadth of knowledge and experiences of the people interviewed in this case not generally afforded an outsider. The design of the study was not deliberately longitudinal, another of Yin's (2003) rationales for a single case study. However, over the course of the study, which took more two years to complete, an evolution of the employer branding process within the organisation was observed and studied. The case began when the organisation was in a state of flux due to the parent group having just bought other hospitals within Western Australia. This brought questions of whether to brand as one hospital or one organisation. The hospital was also expanding its operating theatres and patient capacity and therefore would require more staff. The case finished while the hospital was still undergoing redevelopment but following a major redesign of the way recruitment was conducted.

Applying Hartley's (2004) rationales to this study related to employer branding it is clear that the organisational and environmental context is having a profound impact on influencing social processes. Within the dynamic environment of a knowledge-based economy, at a time when there is such a dire skills shortage, a case study certainly allows exploration of the new and emergent properties of life in organisations. The fast pace of change in recruitment would indeed be difficult to capture in a singular quantitative survey. Even over the life of the case study many changes were observed in organisational behaviour.

Turning to Gummesson's (2003) definition of a case study, certainly this study does not look at isolated variables but wants to look at the interplay of factors within an organisation through the different hierarchies, and even outside an organisation during recruitment and across departments. The case study under consideration in this study, while certainly of intrinsic value, is *instrumental* (Stake 2000) in that it provides insight into the issue of employer branding and also attempts to make generalisations associated with employer branding. The complexity of the employer branding process has been discussed in the preceding literature review. It has been noted that employer branding is a cross-functional process that goes across many academic and practitioner disciplines, therefore a survey may not capture the richness and nuances of information that a qualitative-based case study has the potential to capture.

4.3.2.1 Induction versus Deduction in Case Studies and Qualitative Research

There is no consensus amongst researchers over whether qualitative and case study research should be solely inductive or deductive. However, deductive reasoning tends to be associated with the positivist approach. Deductive reasoning sees the researcher start with a theory, and, usually in a linear progression, narrow this down to one or more hypotheses which are tested using actual data. Inductive reasoning, by contrast, starts with the data and from that data moves to broader theories. According to Daymon & Holloway (2002), qualitative research usually starts with inductive reasoning and then,

through a sequential process, employs deductive reasoning. Theory, they suggest, emerges mainly from the data collection rather than being generated from the literature and tested through fieldwork.

In this thesis, a circular interlinking of empirical steps was employed (Flick 1998). In qualitative research there is a mutual interdependence of the single parts of the research process (Flick 1998). Using a qualitative approach, coding will be used to identify common themes emerging from the data. Indeed, according to Gummesson (2003), a case study could be primarily inductive, where the case provides data for conceptualisation and theory generation, or primarily deductive, where cases are used to confront existing theory with reality.

The question of induction over deduction is further clouded by the arguments over whether the case study as a method of inquiry is truly a qualitative methodology and constructivist in nature. Indeed the prominent case study researcher, Yin, based his deductive approach on the positivistic or scientific framework, advocating the development of hypotheses, collecting empirical data and drawing conclusions based on the data (Yin 1993). While many authors put case studies in the qualitative framework (J Creswell 2003; Daymon & Holloway 2002; Gummesson 1991), Yin (1993) argued that case study research can be qualitative or quantitative. While acknowledging Yin's significant contributions to case study methodology, this researcher will use a qualitative approach. Themes will emerge from the data which may then produce new theory or challenge or confirm older theory. Indeed this cycling back between the data first and then the literature is suggested by Carson et al (2001, p. 12) who proposed that "a balance of inductive and deductive approaches will be the most appropriate for interpretive philosophies/approaches to research".

4.3.3 Units of Analysis

...no matter what the topic of study, qualitative researchers, in contrast to their quantitative colleagues, claim forcefully to know relatively little about what a

given piece of observed behaviour means until they have developed a description of the context in which the behaviour takes place and attempted to see the behaviour from the position of its originator. Direct, first hand and more or less intimate knowledge of a research setting guides most qualitative study (Van Maanen 1979, p. 520).

As has been outlined, the researcher has chosen a single case study design, rather than a multiple case design. The research is focused on the private health care industry within Australia and specifically on employer branding applied to the nursing shortage. The acute nursing shortage and the significant resources used by the case hospital to address this problem make the context of the case unusual and significant, as advocated by Johns (2001). One of the research questions being posed relates to the role of relationships versus reputation. The case hospital, located in Western Australia, is one of the largest private hospitals in Australia and belongs to a group which is the largest private hospital operator within Australia, listed on the Australian Stock Exchange. The company which owns the hospital is viewed by industry analysts as having both a strong reputation and relationships with key stakeholders (Chappel 2005). The case hospital has previously won a prestigious award for best overall performance in the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's national Corporate Work and Family Awards (Clery 2000) so would be seen as having at least some elements of "best practice" in human resources management. These facts point to the hospital being, if not perhaps an "extreme" case under Yin's (2003) typology, then certainly one which is a leader in its field. However, it could be argued that the skills shortage faced by the hospital was "extreme".

As well as the options of single versus multiple case design, Yin also suggests that cases can be "holistic" (that is a single unit of analysis) or a case or cases with embedded units of analysis. Yin's (2003) embedded, single case study design was chosen as the appropriate research technique – that is where, within a single case, attention is given to units and subunits. In fact, Yin himself used the example of a hospital where, though the case study is about a single organisation, the analysis also includes outcomes about the clinical services and staff employed by the hospital. A single case study can be used to

investigate multiple hierarchical levels within a single study (Maylor & Blackmon 2005). Significantly, the “context” is also given due consideration in this study (Johns 2001), with attention paid to the views of potential employees (graduate nurses) beyond the organisation.

4.3.4 The Role of the Researcher

As previously mentioned, qualitative research is interpretive and the inquirer is involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants (Creswell 2003). This means that there are strategic, ethical and personal issues involved (Creswell 2003). Possible bias is also a concern (Strauss & Corbin 1990) which will now be addressed with disclosure of the background of the researcher.

Prior to working as an academic, I worked in the public relations and marketing field for 15 years. I worked in public relations consultancy as well as in-house as the public relations manager for two major private hospitals, including the case hospital. Professional experience can be a source of theoretical sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin 1990). My background gave me unprecedented access to the hospital and also engendered a level of trust from the interviewees which would not perhaps have been possible from someone with no experience in this area.

The researcher is believed to have “theoretical sensitivity”, due to her personal and professional experience, as well as a thorough investigation of the literature (Strauss & Corbin 1990, p. 42). On a cautionary note, this type of experience can also block the researcher from seeing things that have become obvious. Therefore, to minimise bias, research must be balanced by a) frequently stepping back from the data b) maintaining an attitude of scepticism and c) following the correct data collection and analysis procedures (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

4.4 Data Collection Method

This section outlines the step-by-step process of collecting the data. The approach chosen follows Yin's (2003) principles of case study data collection, including using multiple sources of evidence, creating a case study database and maintaining a chain of evidence. In addition, it was important to proceed systematically, record all forms of analysis and report procedures (Spiggle 1994). Initially, contact was made with the executive director of the chosen case hospital. The executive director was approached by personal phone call and then permission was sought during a face-to-face discussion for access to interview staff employed by the hospital, access to employer branding material as well as permission to contact medical specialists accredited to admit patients to the hospital. Following discussion of the nature of the project a letter was sent to gain formal approval from the executive director which was obtained. After approval was gained, the director of medical services supplied contact details for a limited number of medical specialists. A letter drafted by the researcher and slightly modified by the medical services director was sent to medical specialists to seek an in-depth interview. The director of clinical services, who is responsible for nursing and allied health staff within the hospital, gave permission for focus group interviews and assisted the researcher gain access to nursing staff for the focus groups. Other key managers were approached personally. The main process of data collection (the in-depth interviews) was conducted from February 2006 to December 2007 with member checking occurring, that is going back to the source for confirmation of themes, throughout. In addition, ongoing communication was maintained with the case hospital until finalization of the thesis.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews, usually lasting for up to an hour, were conducted with key informants. A list of interviews and focus groups is provided below in Table 3.2. All four of the most senior ("executive") managers of the case hospital were interviewed. The executive are the "top tier" of the hospital's organisational structure. The four members of the executive are: the executive director of the hospital; the

director of clinical services (who has responsibilities for nursing and allied health) and the director of medical administration; the director of corporate services (who has responsibilities for non-clinical and non-medical areas).

Two key staff with a direct impact on the employer brand of the case hospital were interviewed: the human resources (employee relations) manager and the marketing and public relations manager. Two staff directly involved with recruitment were also interviewed: the training and development manager and the nurse manager, clinical services. Other one-on-one, in-depth interviews were conducted with three medical specialists accredited with several hospitals, including the chosen case.

Six focus groups were conducted with nurses at different levels of experience within the hospital setting and those at the very start of their career, outside the hospital. The focus groups within the hospital were conducted at the start of study days for the different groups. While the focus of the study is the case hospital, it was important to obtain information from potential recruits about to graduate and choose a hospital. This became clearer as the interviews proceeded, following along the lines suggested by Spiggle (1994) who suggests that in purposive and theoretical sampling, analysis of initial interviews indicates the types of individuals chosen for succeeding ones. Indeed, Berthon, Ewing and Li (2005) discussed this under-researched aspect of employer branding, suggesting there is a need to determine whether the employer brand can increase job satisfaction and decrease post-employment dissonance once an employee starts at a workplace. They proposed a research area to determine perceptions prior to and post joining an organisation, suggesting that final year students may have more naïve perceptions of job attributes (Berthon, Ewing & Li 2005). To obtain the opinions of final year students it was clearly necessary to conduct focus groups outside the hospital at university and TAFE level. Permission to conduct a focus group with students about to graduate from Curtin University of Technology's Bachelor of Science (Nursing) was sought from the acting head of school by phone and e-mail. Students were invited to attend the focus group via fliers and a personal approach within a lecture. A small prize of a gift voucher was used as an incentive. Permission to conduct a focus

group with students about to graduate from the Enrolled Nursing course at the West Coast College of TAFE was sought by phone and e-mail from the lecturer and clinical co-ordinator of Enrolled Nursing at the TAFE College. It was the last day of the students' classroom contact prior to graduating.

With interviews and focus groups, having good interpersonal skills and being adept at social interaction is important (Daymon & Holloway 2002). Given the researcher's professional experience as a communicator, the researcher is believed to have good interpersonal skills.

The sampling strategies of qualitative research are guided by the underlying principle of gaining rich, in-depth information (Daymon & Holloway 2002). Therefore judgement sampling was used for the in-depth interviews. Judgement sampling is defined as involving the choice of subjects who are in the best position to provide the information required (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2001). Judgement sampling design is used when a limited number or category of people have the information that is sought and may be the only useful type of sampling for answering certain types of research questions (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2001). Purposive (or purposeful) sampling is a similar term used, where individuals are "chosen by certain pre-determined criteria relevant to the research question" (Daymon & Holloway 2002, p. 273). In qualitative research, non-probability methods of sampling are most commonly used as they have the distinct advantage of quickly assessing participants who will provide rich information (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2001). As has previously been stated, the research questions look at the differences in opinions between different levels within a hospital hierarchy. It was also important to capture the opinions of those with a direct influence on the hospital employer brand. Therefore, judgement sampling was the appropriate choice. For the focus groups, judgement sampling was also used. Each focus group consisted of a homogenous grouping of individuals with regards to their level of experience (for example, all recent graduates or all with approximately five years' experience). To answer the research questions it was important to capture the opinions of people at different levels within the hospital as well as prospective employees outside the hospital.

Table 4.2: List of interviews conducted:

Subject	Method
Executive Director	In-depth interview
Director of Clinical Services	In-depth interview
Director of Medical Services	In-depth interview
Director of Corporate Services	In-depth interview
Human Resources Manager	In-depth interview
Marketing and Public Relations Manager	In-depth interview
Training and Development Manager	In-depth interview
Nurse Manager, Clinical Services	In-depth interview
Three medical specialists	In-depth interview
Undergraduate registered nurses	1 Focus group (6 participants)
Undergraduate enrolled nurses	1 Focus group (18 participants)
Graduate registered nurses with less than 6 months' experience	1 Focus group (12 participants)
Graduate enrolled nurses with less 9 months' experience	1 Focus group (12 participants)
Nurses with five years' experience	1 Focus group (10 participants)
Clinical nurses with 10 years' experience	1 Focus group (10 participants)

4.4.1 Interview Methods and Study Setting

The qualitative research interview, as one of the most complex and socially interactive forms of social research activity, exemplifies that there will always be a conscious and rational as well as a subconscious and irrational view of reality seeking expression (Whiteley et al. 1998, p. 7).

Whitely et al's (1998) reference to the challenges of interviewing are also detailed by Patton (2002) who warns of the dangers, but also the rewards of interviewing.

Limitations in interviews include the discrepancies between what informants say they do and what they actually do; the time consuming and labour intensive nature of interviews, the question of subjectivity and the effect of the interviewer on the interview itself (Daymon & Holloway 2002, p. 184). Indeed Whitely et al (1998) outlined the variables which can affect the outcome of an interview which include the gender of the interviewee and interviewer, the timing of the interview, the relative status of both parties, how language is phrased and its tone (paralinguistics) and the physical space between the interviewer and interviewee (proxemics). Whitely et al (1998) presented a particularly daunting list of challenges and considerations for the novice researcher and could almost deter anyone from attempting an interview. I was certainly mindful of the variables which could affect the interview and was also keen to establish trust with the interviewees. It is important to build up trust right from the start of the interview (Daymon & Holloway 2002) and beyond its completion. Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran (2001) even go so far as to outline the different phases of an interview in diagrammatic format and highlight the importance of “entrance and exit time investment”, using ritual and informal exchange to develop intimacy within the “heart” of the interview.

Interview types range on a continuum from unstructured to structured (Daymon & Holloway 2002; Patton 1990). The interviews for the current research were “semi-structured”, which means that interviews did not always stick specifically to the interview guide but often followed a line of thought or questioning raised by the interviewee.. Prior to the start of the in-depth interviews and focus groups, a discussion guide was devised and approved by the project supervisor and the Curtin University Ethics Committee. The discussion guide was developed more to tease out every possible question on the topic but during the real interviews/focus groups, when themes emerged from the first question, for example, which was far more open, these were followed rather than slavishly sticking to the discussion guide. This approach allowed new themes to emerge and also gave the interviews more of a conversational tone. Some questions were added and some replaced by others as the study wore on, in line with new themes emerging from data already collected. Within the discussion guide, depending on the interviewee, questions were added to or modified, to make sure the discussion was

relevant to the interviewee's position and responsibility for or perspective on employer branding. For example, registered nurses were not expected to know what employer branding was – this concept was explained prior to questioning. However, questions central to the study were retained throughout, in order to maintain a consistent framework and “thread” to base analysis on. A copy of the discussion guide can be found in the appendices. The in-depth interviews were conducted within the participants' offices or, in two instances, in cafés close to their place of work. The study was conducted in a natural or non-contrived setting where work proceeded normally. The average interview lasted 30 minutes, with times ranging from 20 minutes to an hour. All interviews were tape recorded, using a small personal tape recorder, and detailed notes were also taken by hand. The interviews were transcribed by the interviewer at a later time. For reasons of confidentiality transcripts are not included with this thesis.

With two of the key informants, the human resources manager and the marketing and public relations manager, more than one interview was conducted. This was to gain more understanding of rich areas of interest and to follow up on themes initially identified once the initial interviews were transcribed. The value of interviews is that they are flexible because the answers given by the interviewees inform the evolving conversation (Daymon & Holloway 2002, p. 167). Another advantage is that the data collected is situated within the interviewees' social context – therefore based on the participants' own interpretation of events and own words. For example, as discussed earlier, the focus groups within the hospital were held within the organisation's own training seminar room. This contrasts with quantitative surveys where responses are treated as if they are independent of the contexts that produce them (Daymon & Holloway 2002).

4.4.2 Focus Group Methods

Focus groups are another variation on the interview theme. Similarities with interviews include the use of an overall pattern to structure the focus group and the importance of the skills of listening, questioning, probing and summarising (Cavana, Delahaye &

Sekaran 2001). A focus group can be described as a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic or topics (Carson et al. 2001, p. 114). The focus group method is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic (Patton 2002). Participants are typically a relatively homogenous group of people who are asked to reflect on the questions asked by the interviewer. The advantages of focus groups include that they are highly efficient (in one hour the evaluator can gather information from eight people instead of one person) and the very nature of the group exerts some quality controls on data (Patton 2002). In conducting a focus group a facilitator has to be aware of a number of specific issues including whether the focus group should be structured or unstructured, the logistics, group composition and the processes of conducting the focus group (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2001).

A key advantage of focus group methodology for interpretive researchers is in learning how respondents talk and construct their own understanding about the phenomenon of interest (Carson et al. 2001). The most important feature of the focus group is their ability to reveal complex behaviours and motivations and this is the direct result of the interaction within the group (Carson et al. 2001).

4.5 Methods of Data Analysis

The interpretive approach to this study requires that theories emerge from the data, which comprises the in-depth interviews and focus groups as well as documentary evidence supplied from the hospital. Gathering data, analysis and report writing are not mutually exclusive activities (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2001; Spiggle 1994). The data must be constantly reviewed and compared at every stage of the research which is acknowledged as a “rich, messy and complex process” (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2001, p. 175). However, while it may be messy and complex, there is also a procedure to follow, using content analysis and the constant comparative method to explore the raw data (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2001). An important feature of research to build theory from case studies is the frequent overlap of data analysis with data collection (Eisenhardt 1989).

Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran (2001) offer a 15-step process, acknowledging that these steps may not be a linear progression. In summary, once data has been collected and copied for safe keeping, the next major step is to read the data, getting a general sense of the information (Creswell 2003). Open coding is employed where the data is broken down and initial categories are formed. Axial coding involves refining and developing the categories (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Finally selective coding – usually occurring during the third reading of the data (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2001) - involves making an interpretation of the meaning of the data (Creswell 2003). Making meaning or finding what were the “lessons learned”, involves the researchers’ personal interpretation but also can be meaning derived from a comparison of the findings with existing theories and literature (Creswell 2003).

Using the qualitative data analysis software program, NVivo 7, has aided the data analysis process of this research. The NVivo program allows the researcher to manage diverse data, to record decisions and create new records (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2001). The program, as the name suggests, aids in inductive thinking. Index trees, concepts or categories can be constructed by the researchers as the data is analysed. For example, the concept of “flexibility” came through as an important functional benefit for staff interviewed. The notion of “flexibility” was also used in the organisation’s employer brand advertising and reflects the company’s recruitment slogan of “we know there’s more to life than work”.

4.6 Questions of Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness

One cannot complete any largely qualitative, single case study without referring to the criticisms of subjectivity and bias which are often made by those from the positivist paradigm. However, validity is seen as a strength of qualitative research (Creswell 2003) and is seen as more important within qualitative research than questions of reliability and generalisability (Creswell 2003; Daymon & Holloway 2002). Validity refers to the “extent to which the researcher’s findings are accurate, reflect the purpose of the study

and represent reality” (Daymon & Holloway 2002, p. 274). There are a number of different strategies available to check the accuracy of the findings of the researcher and to provide evidence of validity. This research will use several of these strategies.

Four tests are commonly used to establish the quality of any empirical social research, according to Yin (2003). These four tests are for construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability (Yin 2003) . As discussed, it is important to remember that Yin comes from a positivist perspective, so his treatment is different to other researchers interested in case study trustworthiness.

Putting this distinction aside and looking at the first of Yin’s four tests, construct validity refers to establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied (Yin 2003). According to Yin (2003), construct validity can be established by using multiple sources of evidence, maintaining a chain of evidence and having the draft case study report reviewed by key informants. Within this case study, these suggestions have been followed. All interviews have been transcribed and held on file by both the researcher and her supervisor with dates noted. Advertising and promotional material is also held on file. The interviews were also managed electronically within the NVivo program. Continuous contact was maintained with the hospital throughout the entire research and write up. The second test, the question of internal validity (for explanatory or causal studies only and not for descriptive or exploratory studies), looks at establishing a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions, as distinguished from spurious relationships (Yin 2003). As this case study is not a causal case study, but rather a descriptive and exploratory one, this criterion is not relevant.

Looking at the third question of external validity, (establishing the domain to which a finding’s study can be generalised) this single case study will not be concerned with statistical generalisation but analytical generalisation to develop research propositions. As Yin (2003) put it, survey research is concerned with statistical generalisation where as case studies rely on analytical generalisation. “Case studies, like experiments, are generalisable to theoretic propositions and not to populations or universes (Yin 2003, p.

10).” Finally, the definition of reliability involves demonstrating that the operations of a study such as the data collection procedures – can be repeated with the same results (Yin 2003). Yin advised using a case study protocol and developing a case study data base, both of which have been done in this study.

From a more interpretive perspective, goodness of qualitative research can be characterized by concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity (Daymon & Holloway 2002). The criteria for evaluating trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Daymon & Holloway 2002). To ensure credibility, “member checking” (Daymon & Holloway 2002; Lincoln & Guba 1985; Yin 2003) is used in this study, that is checking back with the original interviewees. At the conclusion of interviews and coding, key participants were contacted to discuss key themes which had emerged. These themes were, indeed, verified by the organisation’s members.

The question of transferability will always be more tenuous in single case study research and is often seen as a major negative of single case study research (Yin 2003). Transferability is linked to generalisability. As has been discussed in section 4.3.2, Stake (2000) suggested that each case will have its own intrinsic interest but can also be instrumental in that findings can be applied to the wider world. While the case hospital under examination will have its own particular issues due to its unique history, culture and personalities involved, there is an argument for transferability as many of the challenges faced – and solutions decided upon - in employer branding will be relevant in any private hospital setting and some of the challenges may be faced in any organisation with a skills shortage. Similar situations may tend to occur in similar hospitals. Indeed, this age old argument can be looked at when one thinks of literature. The circumstances of a character in Taliban Afghanistan in a novel by Khaled Hosseini, for example, may be particular to that situation but will have wider relevance to the human experience and therefore will resonate with readers across the globe. Transferability can also occur through the development of theoretical propositions which arise from the empirical data. These can be transferred to different settings and then tested using quantitative research.

The third criteria for trustworthiness, dependability, is closely linked to credibility (Daymon & Holloway 2002) and the concepts of construct validity and reliability (Yin 2003). Findings need to be consistent and accurate to be seen as dependable, according to Daymon and Holloway (2002). To achieve dependability an audit trail must be used, or as Yin puts it, a “chain of evidence”(2003). All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed and the step-by-step process of obtaining interviews has been documented in this thesis. However, to protect the identity of the participants and due to commercial sensitivities, raw data, such as the transcripts can not be included in the body of this dissertation. Edited versions may be provided upon request from the study author and with the permission of the case study organisation. It is worth noting that a tension exists because of the need for trust on the readers’ part that the data is “true” and the need on the organisation’s part to trust the researcher that its identity be protected. This tension is inherent in any qualitative study that goes in-depth into an organisation’s or individual’s life.

The fourth and final criterion, confirmability, refers to the ability to be able to track data sources and make use of such data (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Again, the concept of an “audit trail” or chain of evidence is important. Another important point when referring to confirmability is to identify and analyse any “negative cases” (Daymon & Holloway 2002). Negative cases are those instances when data is inconsistent with earlier findings – indeed it may be the opposite view or perspective to one already uncovered. The uncovering and reporting of “dissenting voices” in this study will help to show the findings are not simply the result of preconceived assumptions (Daymon & Holloway 2002). An ongoing literature review was conducted throughout the research with comparison of the emergent concepts and theory with the extant literature (Eisenhardt 1989). While this does not fit with the “purest” form of research advocated by grounded theory adherents (Glaser & Strauss 1967), it guided the researcher in preparing the questions for the semi-structured interviews and, during later stages, helped enlighten as well as confront the researcher when key themes emerged.

Importantly, for confirmability, data was “triangulated”, with multiple sources of evidence used (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2001; Daymon & Holloway 2002; Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 2003). Along with the main source of evidence – the depth interviews and focus groups - newspaper reports about the case hospital and its parent company, company documents, the organisation’s website and recruitment advertising and related promotional material were all reviewed, and compared and contrasted with the thoughts elicited from study participants.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

It is argued that ethics are intrinsic to the constructivist paradigm because the investigator does not hide his or her intent and the investigator seeks dialogue to create meaning with the participants under investigation (Guba & Lincoln 1994). On the other hand, there may be “sticky” problems of confidentiality and anonymity as well as other interpersonal difficulties (Guba & Lincoln 1989). In this vein, the inductive and holistic nature of qualitative research means there are inherent problems and dilemmas and close attention must be paid to ethical issues (Daymon & Holloway 2002). According to Daymon and Holloway (2002), there are a number of basic ethical principles which should be followed, including: “the right of free and informed choice, protection from harm to individuals and equipment, and principles of privacy, autonomy and honesty” (Daymon & Holloway 2002, p. 78).

The “sticky problems” referred to by Guba and Lincoln (1989) have been a constant source of tension for the researcher when so intimately involved with a case study. *On a personal note, often times I have struggled with exactly what is doing the “right” thing by the organisation and the individuals who gave so freely of their time, for example by not over-stepping the mark in terms of “asking too much”, and doing the right thing in capturing and presenting the data outside the hospital to different audiences, including the academic community. I was also conscious that some of the issues raised may be sensitive and perhaps unpalatable to the case organisation but conscious of the “truth” that needed to be told. A comment from the HR Manager at the case hospital stuck with*

me when I presented her with my tentative findings – “If you don’t want to know the answer, don’t ask the question!”

It was always the intention of the researcher that the basic ethical principles - “the right of free and informed choice, protection from harm to individuals and equipment, and principles of privacy, autonomy and honesty” (Daymon & Holloway 2002) – should be followed. Each of these principles will be dealt with in turn. At the outset, when dealing with the executive director of the hospital, the concept of a *free and informed choice* was considered. The executive director was informed of the nature of the research prior to gaining permission. However, due to the evolving nature of qualitative research, a decision was made after initial contact that the research suited a case study approach, rather than a more general qualitative study. This necessitated a second discussion with the executive director and, importantly, permission for this change in direction to occur, considering the in-depth nature of a single case study. When the researcher conducted interviews or focus groups, an information sheet outlining the nature of the research was given to every informant (see appendix). The informants were reminded in writing and verbally that their participation was voluntary and they did not need to answer any questions if they did not wish to do so.

Looking at the concept of *protection from harm*, the researcher was well aware of any emotional risks for participants (such as being seen as being critical of the organisation); hence the written and verbal assurances of anonymity for focus group members. None of the focus group members were identified individually back to managers. Turning to the concept of principles of *privacy, autonomy and honesty*, no employees have been referred to by name within the body of the research document. The organisation has not been identified. The information was recorded on a hand-held tape recorder while the researcher/interviewer also took notes at the time of the interview and the interviews were all transcribed by the researcher. All of these steps were taken to ensure that the information was handled and processed as faithfully to the original delivery as possible.

Following correct research procedures, permission for approval for the research has been sought and granted from the Curtin Business School Ethics Committee, using the “Minimal Risk Ethics Form C”. All participants have done so voluntarily.

4.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has provided an outline of the research process and a justification of the methodological choice. The nature of qualitative research and the paradigm of choice which informs the research were discussed. The conceptual foundations for the study were addressed and the research methods, which relied on mainly qualitative data within a case study framework, were explained. The data collection, using interviews, focus groups and documentary evidence, was outlined, with the ethical considerations detailed. There was a necessary level of detail related to the data collection method in order to ensure the verifiability of the research as well as its ethical underpinnings.

Chapter 5

Findings and Analysis

5.0 Chapter Overview

Chapter 5 will discuss the primary findings of the dissertation, beginning with a short explanation of roles of the key managerial members of the organisation with regards to employer branding and a guide to coding within the analysis. This will be followed by a discussion of the role of relationships and their influence on the employer brand as perceived by registered and enrolled nurses at undergraduate level and with different levels of experience, post graduating. Different factors contributing to the influence of relationships will be discussed, starting prior to employment. The common theme of respect, which has emerged at all career levels among nurses, will then be discussed. Next, the influence of a negative visibility related to reputation and its impact on employer attractiveness will be discussed. Other perceived drivers of reputation, as identified in the literature review, including sponsorship and community involvement, will be reviewed. Differences in opinions on key factors related to the employer brand will be discussed. The barriers to implementing the employer branding concept will be detailed, focusing on management views at middle and senior levels. The concept of integration emerged in the course of the interviews as a key theme to overcome barriers. The evolution of the employer branding process at the case hospital has indicated that integration could be a key to success. The chapter will conclude with a summary of findings and the main factors identified as influencing perceptions of the employer brand.

5.1 An Explanation of Employer Branding Responsibilities within the Case Organisation for and Codes used to Identify Respondents

Prior to an analysis of the findings it is desirable for the reader to have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different managerial interviewees with regards to employer branding. Unfortunately, it must be acknowledged, clarity is not

always easy. As has been discussed in the literature review, the responsibility for employer branding within any organisation is complex and cross-functional. This can certainly be demonstrated within the case hospital, where some areas of responsibility are clear and others more blurred. For example, the training and development manager, who reports to the director of clinical services, and the staff of training and development play a large role in recruitment and training of graduate enrolled and registered nurses who then spend time completing a “graduate programme” within the hospital setting which involves study days as well as on-the-job training. Hence graduate training does not stop at the conclusion of university. The human resources manager has a major role to play in recruitment and developing and maintaining the employer brand, both at a tactical and strategic level. The marketing and public relations manager, obviously active in marketing at a corporate level, also has strong responsibilities in the area of recruitment and employer branding. The executive director and the other directors set and approve the strategic vision and goals for the hospital. Day-to-day recruitment of nurses is also driven by nurse managers with assistance in areas such as international recruitment from the nurse manager, clinical services. Finally, recruitment is also divided along professional lines, with the director of clinical services taking responsibility for nursing recruitment while the director of medical services has responsibility for attraction of medical specialists and the director of corporate services takes overall responsibility for recruitment of non-clinical staff. The complexity of the employer branding process was further clouded during the data collection by recent acquisition of other major hospitals by the case hospital’s parent company. Queries emerged about whether to promote the hospital or the group of hospitals and whether senior staff at the case hospital should take on wider responsibilities.

The following table shows the codes use to identify different respondents' quotations.

Table 5.1 Coding for Interviews

Interviewees/focus groups	Abbreviation
Executive director	E Director
Director of clinical services	Director CS
Director of medical services	Director MS
Director of corporate services	Director CorS
Human resources manager	HR Manager
Marketing and public relations manager	MPR Manager
Training and development manager	TD Manager
Nurse manager, clinical services	N Manager, CS
Three medical specialists	MS1, MS2, MS3
Undergraduate registered nurses: focus group	FG – undergrad RNs
Undergraduate enrolled nurses: focus group	FG – undergrad ENs
Graduate enrolled nurses: focus group	FG – grad ENs
Graduate registered nurses with six months' experience: focus group	FG – RNs, 6 mos experience
Graduate registered nurses with nine months' experience: focus group	FG – RNs, 9mos experience
Nurses with five years' experience: focus group	FG –RNs, 5 yrs experience
Clinical nurses with 10 years' experience: focus group	FG – CNs, 10 yrs experience

Table 5.2 Coding for hospitals mentioned in interviews

Case Hospital		<i>CH</i>
Large Govt Hospital 1	–	<i>LGH1</i>
Large Govt Hospital 2	-	<i>LGH2</i>
Large Govt Hospital 3		<i>LGH3</i>
Large Govt Hospital 4		<i>LGH4</i>
Small Govt Hospital 1		<i>SGH1</i>
Small Govt Hospital 2		<i>SGH2</i>
Large Private Hospital		<i>LPH1</i>
Large Private Hospital 2		<i>LPH2</i>
Large Private Hospital 3		<i>LPH3</i>

Note on coding: Where people’s names have been in used in interviews, real names have not been used but have been generally substituted with the title of the person’s role within the hospital.

5.2 The Question of Relationships

As has been discussed in the literature review, employer branding has three key dimensions – functional, economic and psychological benefits (Ambler & Barrow 1996). This study concentrates on the functional and psychological benefits associated with the employer brand because economic benefits (mostly encapsulated within salary) are largely beyond the remit of the marketing and public relations department. Within this study the key theoretical question posed is whether employer attractiveness is influenced more by a company’s relationships or reputation. Relationships are analysed in the context of functional benefits and the concept of reputation is analysed in the

context of psychological benefits. As has been discussed in the literature review, the role of relationship marketing and internal marketing are seen as key concepts under the functional aspect of employer branding. So how do potential employees, who ordinarily have no relationship with an organisation prior to employment, make a judgement on employer attractiveness? It could be assumed that an organisation's reputation - judged from second-hand sources - would be paramount. To the contrary, findings from interviews with nurses at all levels of experience are that prior to employment, nurses often *do* have relationships with the hospital they choose to work at later. For younger nurses, the relationships are mostly through practical work experience (or "pracs") while they are still at university and later through agency nursing and that these relationships are an important way to judge employer attractiveness, prior to applying for a position. The relationship of the hospital with its current staff was also seen as important in generating positive word of mouth, which, of course, would then influence its reputation. Table 5.3 summarises key findings on relationships related to employer branding. Each of these findings will be discussed in turn and in detail below.

Table 5.3 Key findings/themes on relationships

Themes	Findings
Importance of familiarity prior to recruitment	Nurses appeared more likely to join an organisation they had already had experience of. As graduates, their experience was often through practicums while studying.
Importance of first impressions at recruitment stage	During phone calls and interviews, recruits assessed the friendliness/suitability of the hospital.
Relationships damaged on the inside	Some nurses felt (the) hospital/s overpromised and under-delivered. The reality of the brand was not seen as “authentic” by some.
The need for respect	All nurses felt the need for respect
Flexibility	Across all ages, flexible work hours were seen as important
Support	Younger, less experienced workers valued support in their early career

5.2.1 The Importance of Familiarity before Recruitment

In response to a question to a focus group of recently graduated registered nurses on why they joined the case hospital when they knew the pay was better at public hospitals the following comment illustrated the importance of familiarity – or an existing relationship.

Most of us - I had a prac here – I knew the paperwork, I knew the wards, I knew some of the staff – you talked to other grads on the programme.

(FG – RNs, 9 mos experience)

This comment could be seen as illustrating the concept of “it’s better the devil you know”. The importance of the “prac” experience for the graduate nurses when deciding on an attractive employer came through as a common theme in all the focus groups. The following comment is an illustration of this theme.

I think a lot of people it’s where you do your prac. Like I never did a prac at LGH1 so I was never really too keen on going to LGH1, ‘cause I didn’t know what it was like, whereas I did a couple here. (FG – RNs, 9 mos experience)

The graduate enrolled nurses had a similar response in their focus group, discussing the need for support and judging this using their personal experiences and word-of-mouth from fellow students.

I think, too, when you do your training you get to go to a wide range of facilities, anyway, so between what you get to see and what the other students tell you it gives you an indication of where you want to go. (FG – grad ENs)

Actually that’s how I decided I wanted to come here was I did my prac here and I enjoyed the experience so much that I wanted to come – so I was like, put in for [the case hospital], because I knew I had enjoyed it and they had good staff. (FG – grad ENs)

The more senior nurses recognised that in nursing it was possible to “try before you buy” by doing agency work. Interestingly, management who were responsible for managing the employer branding process were in no doubt as to the importance of relationships. The Training and Development Manager, who is largely responsible for recruiting the graduates into the hospital’s specialised graduate programme as well as co-ordinating the practicums during the nurses’ undergraduate degree, recognised the need to give the students a positive experience to help in recruiting them when they graduated. Her view shows clearly that relationships must come first and the reputation is second.

So it's really down to interaction - so while we have got a captive audience with students coming through we make an effort to make it is as good a learning environment as possible. But there's also that human touch of making sure they feel important and that's how they are welcomed in the organisation. And we are looking at future strategies for capturing that audience. We know from all the jingles and jangles and posters and things might attract a small proportion [but] it's the word of mouth. (TD Manager)

While obviously not involved in the interview stage of recruitment or the day-to-day management of nursing staff, the marketing and public relations manager also recognized the importance of developing a relationship with undergraduates and other potential employees before even trying to recruit them.

With every nursing and staff member, with every patient – that takes a lot of work – and effort – and that takes key messages being delivered consistently across - it's not just like we're launching our ad for the next month – 'Hope you buy' – It's like: 'What did you think of it?' – It's like: 'Do you want to come on board?' It's like every single individual unit being a person – or a stakeholder – requires work – requires a relationship. I mean it's almost entirely relationship marketing. (MPR Manager)

5.2.2 The Importance of First Impressions

For most potential employees, unless they have done a practicum or internship prior to employment, their first relationship-based encounter with an employer is through the application for the position and interview process. To use Carlzon's (1987) moment of truth concept (see the literature review, section 2.3.4), from the services marketing literature, the interview is a key "moment of truth" in the delivery of the employer brand to potential employees. For the undergraduate and graduate nurses, the interview certainly was a key decider in their search for an attractive employer. In fact, several

commented on the friendly nature of the interviews at the case hospital (and certain other hospitals) and contrasted this with some rather daunting interviews at other, particularly, Government hospitals. The undergraduates were also proud of their hard work and achievements at university and wanted to share their university results with their potential future employers.

I can't believe you can go for an interview and they don't want to see what you have done. What you have put in. It shows you're achievers - don't you - you want to achieve. (FG – undergrad RNS, respondent 1)

The undergraduates did not appreciate the rigidity of being given only three scenarios, for example, which they had to comment on.

I actually applied at the public ones first and I didn't like the interview process there. (FG – undergrad RNs, respondent 2)

Oh yeah – terrible. (FG – undergrad RNs, respondent 3)

Yeah – it was very cold and they didn't want to look at any academic results. (FG – undergrad RNs, respondent 1)

This theme of the importance of the relationship developed at interview was echoed by the graduate nurses.

I went to the LGH2 interview as well and it was just horrible – it was like sitting an exam. Even the interview – there was only two of them but because you're a grad you kind of want to be looked after when you come out of uni - be supported a bit and to me LHG2 sounded like there was no support...

you want them to ask you clinical questions cos you want to know you are going to learn a lot there BUT they can still be nice about it and some of the interviews – they were rough – they wouldn't smile at you – you'd think “far out”.

(FG – RNs, 9 mos experience)

At the undergraduate level, one student said she had found one large government hospital to have an encouraging interview approach, while a smaller government hospital had been rigid and “typical public service”. She had accepted a position with the large government hospital, only to be approached later by the smaller hospital with an offer. By then, it was too late and “Maybe next time they [the smaller hospital] will think about the interview process,” was her comment. The relationship developed even prior to interview was also a way of creating an attractive employer brand according to one graduate RN.

Even just over the phone - everyone was so lovely and respectful. They really seemed to value – it seemed like they wanted you for your personal qualities – you weren’t just an inconvenience to them – some others took the attitude that you were just an inconvenience and when you work really hard you don’t appreciate that attitude. (FG – RNs, 6 mos experience)

5.2.2.1 How Technology can Hinder, not Help, Relationship Development

While graduate nurses are typically viewed as being of the generation which appreciates the ease of job applications via the internet, a web-based application process for West Australian Government hospitals, “Graduate Nurse Connect”, was viewed as a hurdle by some respondents. For example, one recent graduate said:

I did the grad connect with it – it was horrible – I mean you finally got through it all and like I remember the LGH2 interview – Christ! – because they didn’t have a closing date – they didn’t get nearly as many applicants so they re-opened it.” (FG – RNs, 9 mos experience).

In contrast, for graduates, the application process at the case hospital (which did not involve an on-line series of hurdles) was seen as reasonably easy. Another large, private hospital also was chosen by undergraduates because of their “prac” experience and a friendly interview process.

The human resources manager at the case hospital recognised the importance of making the recruitment process as simple as possible and emphasised the development of a positive relationship early on. In fact, her view was of a “passive” job seeker and felt recruitment was actually like “selling a car”.

It was very much how can we make life easier for you as a grad applying for the job so then [in the past] we would send out a whole lot of paperwork so we felt no, no we want to kept talking to them – because it’s very easy for them not to accept it whereas if we ring them up and say: “Why what is it? Well did you know we can do this for you or let me know how we can overcome that for you”...so it was very much that approach. (HR Manager)

5.2.3 Relationships Damaged on the Inside

If the recruitment process leading up to employment could be viewed as courtship, then the “marriage” part of the relationship, when the nurse becomes an employee, is critical in the final judgement on a company’s employer brand. Comments from employees showed that the employer brand equity could be badly damaged once they are hired, by failure to live up to the brand promise. As Keller pointed out, one of the “seven deadly sins of brand management” (2003, p. 736) is a broken brand promise which can see a firm worse off than if it had set no expectations at all. Setting brand expectations too high and then not delivering is a common – but deadly – mistake (Keller 2003). The relationship side of the employer branding equation can certainly be damaged by not delivering on advertised benefits. At the case hospital, benefits, taken from the company website, are promoted as:

- Competitive pay and conditions
- Flexible salary packaging
- Flexible banking payments
- Employee assistance programmes
- Free parking

- On-site childcare coordinator
- School holiday programs for children
- Paid parental leave
- Close to public transport
- Library on site
- Gymnasium with subsidised membership
- Subsidised massage & beauty therapies
- Enjoyable social events
- Employee wellness programs
- Corporate private healthcare rates.

These benefits are advertised for all staff, not specifically to nurses. Interestingly, training is not mentioned in this list. The overall response from most of the focus groups was a concern that organisations do over-promise when it comes to recruitment.

Yeah, yep (*Lots of nods of agreement*)... They have to – otherwise they wouldn't get anyone. They can't say: Tiny gym; crap rosters. (*Lots of laughter*) (FG – RNs, 9 mos experience)

Another comment from the graduates related to lifestyle (functional) benefits offered sums up a similar disappointment in the reality.

They offer that they have got all these lifestyle benefits which didn't really live up to it. Like they offer that they have a gym. When they advertise jobs for [the case hospital] they say they have five star benefits and the gym is this little thing, this tiny little thing that the patients use. Like if that lived up to it it would be better as well because that did draw a few people thought that's going to make the lifestyle easier. (FG – RNs, 9 mos experience)

The clinical nurses were in agreement on the issue of over-promising. However, while there was a disconnect between the advertising promise and the reality, the more senior nurses had been with the company for some time and did not express a real desire to leave, perhaps because this advertising had taken place after they had been recruited.

Yes (*General agreement*). They promise the world. In all the ads I mean it says “Flexible rostering.” And all that sort of stuff...“Join the stars (*said in a sarcastic tone*)”. (*Lots of laughter*) Once you get in....It’s pathetic! (FG - CNs, 10 yrs experience)

Recently graduated enrolled nurses also expressed some disappointment and disconnect with the advertising and reality upon joining.

Some of the facilities – like the pool! Like, that was one of the reasons that I applied here - the child care, then you get here and you find out it’s not at this hospital. (FG – grad ENs)

When asked about what was most important in deciding on where to work, the response from the same focus group was: “...nice facilities, well, they said they had a pool, tennis courts and a gym – but there’s no pool and it’s a crappy gym.” (FG – grad ENs) Again, this shows the disconnect between what was attractive at the time of employment and the reality once they had commenced.

In the focus group with graduate registered nurses with six months’ experience, one of the respondents did not feel that the case hospital had over-promised. The nurse’s response was “Some do. Not here.” However, other respondents in the same group felt differently.

Leading up to the interview they promise everything and then you rock up to the interview and they’re not actually flexible and they don’t actually want to keep you. (FG – RNs, 6 mos experience)

It's been a huge adjustment. The hours. And you don't just get enough of the prac as a student. You do Monday to Friday and it's just not the reality. (FG – RNs, 6 mos experience)

This quote shows that it perhaps is not just the over-promising of advertising campaigns but the change in expectations placed upon graduates compared to their student experience. As students, they only had to work Monday to Friday for their practical work experience but once in the “real” workforce, the graduates had to work longer and more “unsocial” hours on shifts across weekends and at night.

There appeared to be little credence given and some cynicism by those nurses interviewed regarding the importance of an organisation's core values as an attractor prior to recruitment, as it was felt that all organisations advertised some form of core values. “The reality is they are all the same,” was one comment. However, if an advertised core value was perceived as not existing once inside, there was severe disappointment

All hospitals are going to have general ones – “Caring”.

I don't think they [core values] have got anything to do with it.

They're all like [case hospital name] “spirit” and do you know what? - seven shifts in a row and patient loads of eight – that's what the [case hospital name] “spirit” is. I knew someone who lasted two weeks and she quit because she didn't think [the case hospital] stood up to its core values. (FG - RNs, 6 mos experience)

5.2.3.1 Functional Benefits – the Promise of Flexibility, the Reality of Rosters

The organisation's promotional slogan aimed at jobseekers, which features across the hospital website, is: “We know there's more to life than work”. It could be argued that inherent in this slogan is a recognition that staff want to have flexibility (or at least some

control) in their work hours. However, a major failure in the delivery of the brand promise at the case hospital appears to be a perception that rostering and lack of choice are key concerns for nursing employees once they join.

On the issue of rostering, recent graduates seemed to be most concerned.

Rostering is a huge issue – it affects your whole life, I think that’s why lots go to casual – they don’t have to...There needs to be a better rotation schedule....You can put in preferences – just being grad you kind of get the leftovers – what everyone else wants. We’re cheapest as well. We all know we have to work weekends but there needs to be a better rotating system of it like when you’re working three nights straight. (FG – RNs, 9 mos experience)

In the interviews, it was also interesting to note resentment from younger nurses without children who felt that there was some favouritism to more flexible rosters for those with children.

You have to have kids – that’s ridiculous. It [rostering] varies – some wards are really good I think but other wards are a bit...they are understaffed. I understand that there’s not much they can do cos they’re understaffed but then that’s not our fault. They will just lose more staff. You get overworked...It just affects everything because if you never know when you’re working you can’t plan anything. Like I have got a 21st in two months – I, well, I will request it off and hopefully I will get it off. Sometimes you work right up to the Friday and you don’t know the following Tuesday what you are working. (FG – RNs, 9 mos experience)

Another source of frustration was the perception that the hospital was understaffed. The hospital’s position as a for-profit hospital was also called into question.

If we're over on [the computer package which is used to determine staffing needs] they will take a nurse away, but then if you're three hours under...They ring you up – patient load – hospitals that offer four patient load rather than six. I have had seven patients – and I am a grad – and sometimes you are a team leader and you're only a grad – we've been doing it for 9 months. If something goes wrong...the allocation – it all comes down to rostering.... (FG – RNs, 9 mos experience)

5.2.4 The Need for Respect

Continuing the theme of the importance of relationship development and maintenance for a strong employer brand, the issue of “respect” emerged as a key factor. “Respect” was desired by potential and existing nursing staff, but it was acknowledged there may be a lack of respect for nurses. There was a sense that recruitment of doctors had always taken priority for management, at least up until recently. It became evident that a major challenge – or perhaps an opportunity – for being an attractive employer for nurses in the health industry was the culture and history of the professions of nursing and medicine, in particular the questions of power and respect.

The following comments were elicited from the focus group with senior clinical nurses.

If you want a lot of money don't be a nurse – do something else....Generally actually we are underpaid. We are undervalued and overworked. There are not enough avenues for promotion. *Within this organisation, or...?*

Across the board. In any other industry if you had a situation with so many demands – it is so ordinary. The salary is poor – A lollypop man can turn a sign around, wear short shorts and get \$100,000. Who's the mug? It's not him!

When you consider it's a documented fact that nursing is one of the most dangerous professions – we should get paid danger money. (FG – CNs, 10 yrs experience)

This comment shows that while salary could be seen purely as an economic benefit, it also has a symbolic quality as it shows that the concepts of “respect” and salary are interlinked.

A graduate summed up her frustrations as the reality of nursing hit her: “I didn’t do three and a half years to wipe people’s bottoms.” (FG – RNs, 9 mos experience). However, those nurses who commented positively said it was definitely the support for their professional skills that made a difference. The nurse recruitment manager (herself from a nursing background), who has recently changed her title to nurse manager – clinical services, felt that the most important thing in attracting nurses was respect. “That’s the reason I’ve been here so long – you are not just treated as a number here – we don’t do salary packaging, but I would rather have the respect and not be treated as a number.” (NManager, CS) [Note: the case hospital does offer limited salary packing, within the regulations of Australian taxation laws. However, Australian State Government-run hospitals and those which are run by Church-related organisations are able to offer more generous salary packaging benefits because of taxation rulings.]

Interestingly, the marketing public relations manager, who had only recently commenced working in the health public relations/marketing field (but with senior experience in other areas) was extremely insightful and honest about this challenge.

I see a massive disparity in how we recruit specialist doctors – the high end – and how we recruit nurses which is more like a cattle call. I think the one thing that is missing is professional respect for that group (nurses). I think it’s appalling, to be honest with you, the way we market to nurses, the way we treat them – they are so far down the rung compared to doctors. I have a huge amount of respect for doctors, but I also have a huge amount of respect for nurses and I think that should translate into how we recruit them, how we communicate with them.
(MPR Manager)

The Executive Director's language also tacitly acknowledged this disparity.

Doctors would want to have good patient care – doctors would want their instructions are to be followed, want to be able to get their patients in – staff to know them – ‘the way I like to do things’; pre-empt what it is this they want...Nurses would want other people to treat them with respect – not to be treated like dirt. (E Director)

The notion of respect is important, ignored and poorly defined in marketing circles (Costley, Friend & Babis 2005). However, it appears to be a major factor that certainly warrants more attention in relation to the concept of employer branding.

5.2.5 Perceptions of Employer Attractiveness

While it may seem an obvious conclusion, one of the findings of this thesis was that different employees have different views of what makes an employer attractive, depending on such factors as their level of experience, life stage and other “psychographics”. It could be said that this has been largely ignored in the literature, with many studies concentrating on relatively homogenous groups such as undergraduates from one particular discipline such as business (for example, Berthon, Ewing & Li 2005). While this study has only concentrated on the nursing profession, clear differences have emerged at different levels of experience.

5.2.5.1 Starting Out, the Need for Support

For undergraduates and recent graduates, one of the key themes to emerge was the need for “support”. A supportive work environment was seen as synonymous with an attractive employer. As has been discussed previously, the way the undergraduates and early graduates assessed this was often through experience during their undergraduate practical experience, through their interaction with recruiting staff at a hospital as well as through word of mouth.

In the focus group interview conducted with graduate nurses with six months' experience, the response to the question on what makes an employer attractive was:

Just starting out – knowing you can go to people, knowing people will be approachable and not...That people actually know you – not just as a number. Feeling valued as a person – not just as an academic number. (FG – RNs, 6 mos experience)

“Support” was commonly the first word mentioned when asked about what makes an attractive employer at undergraduate and recent graduate level for both enrolled and registered nurses.

Another key concept across the board was the ability to have flexibility of rostering and hours. This was not confined to the older, more experienced nurses (who were all women, some with family responsibilities) but across all age groups. However, the concept of “support” was not mentioned in the senior groups and was more likely to be replaced by the concept of flexibility. The following comment is illustrative of this theme.

I think flexibility of working hours. Not everybody has got family but people still like to have a life. To have rosters based on requests as well as on operational needs. (FG – CNs, 10 years experience)

At more senior levels, nurses mentioned the opportunities for career development, but this did not always equate with promotion but rather for knowledge enhancement opportunities and study days.

5.2.6 Relationship Findings in Summary

To recap, the first research question of this thesis was posed as: Is employer attractiveness more influenced by a company's relationships or its reputation? So far in this chapter on findings and analysis we have found that relationships are extremely important and can begin with a potential employee some time before paid employment actually starts. In fact, in the nursing sector, undergraduate "pracs" are an important determinant of the overall impression of the employer brand. Progressing through the "moments of truth" in the employer brand experience, the interview and phone contact prior to employment also are of particular importance during the "courting" phase of the relationship. Use of technology, which may replace a personal relationship, can have a negative influence on employer attractiveness. The employer brand can be significantly damaged by over-promising and failing to deliver. Respect (a largely ignored concept in marketing circles) appears to be a major factor to be considered on the relationships side of the employer brand equation. Under relationships, it was found that different needs were experienced depending on experience levels of the nurses, but flexibility was a key component across the board. The next section of the findings will look at the importance of "reputation" and the psychological benefits of an employer brand.

5.3 The Role of Reputation

Table 5.4 summarises the key findings on the role of reputation in employer branding. These findings will be discussed in turn and in detail.

Table 5.4 Key findings/themes on reputation

Negative visibility can be more powerful than positive visibility
Community sponsorship not seen as a big key to reputation (for potential staff)
Word of mouth for nurses was a significant influence on reputation
Reputation and location important in different ways

Fombrun and van Riel (2004), two of the key scholars who are major proponents of the importance of the concept of reputation, advocated being visible as major determinant of reputation. However, they also conceded that perhaps familiarity was not always so simple and that visibility can be a double edged sword. While the scholars did appear to contradict themselves, they noted that specifically there can be a problem of “negative visibility” – being highly visible as a company with a poor reputation. When specifically queried on the importance of reputation, across undergraduates, graduates, more experienced nurses and management, a common theme was of those hospitals with *negative* reputations being unattractive rather than talking of hospitals with exceptional reputations being magnets.

The focus group with registered nurses with six months’ experience also highlighted the damage of a negative reputation.

I think it’s more the negative. Take Hospital LGH3 for example - If you are hearing all these bad things you are not likely to go out of your way to work there. You are not going to go out of your way to get a job there – you are more inclined to go elsewhere. (FG – RNs, 6 mos experience)

So negative publicity – does that affect your intentions?

I think negative publicity does more damage than positive does good. Definitely – you might say I am going to work at a hospital and people would say ‘why would you want to work there?’ You don’t want to feel like you have to have to defend it. You want to be happy where you are. (FG – RNs, 6 mos experience)

The focus group with the senior, experienced, clinical nurses provoked a similar reaction, which could be linked to the concept of Social Identity Theory, discussed in the literature review. As discussed previously, Social Identity Theory states that people’s identity and self esteem are partly determined by their membership of social

organisations, such as the organisation they work for or their specific workgroup (Lievens, Van Hove & Anseel 2007). Lievens, Van Hove and Anseel (2007) discuss the “cocktail party test” where people’s reaction in a social situation (such as a cocktail party) to where you work will have an impact on your own feelings about the organisation. The nurses’ views seem to tie into this theory as they suggest that they don’t want to work for a hospital that others disapprove of.

I guess you need to be able to tell people that you work at a good place – I guess if it’s got a bad reputation then you think the nurses are bad...It gives you a sense of security.

I guess there are certain hospitals you wouldn’t work at because they have got negative publicity. Some hospitals have a lot of adverse publicity. The negative can be a driver away. (FG – CNs, 10 yrs experience)

The enrolled nurse graduates also spoke of deciding not to work at a hospital because of its negative reputation.

Well there’s one round the corner but I wouldn’t go there. Travelling’s not a problem – if it’s a good workplace then I am happy to travel rather than if it’s five minutes away and I hated working there. (FG – grad ENs)

This is significant because, at least in the case of this nurse, a negative reputation (negative psychological benefit) outweighed an important functional benefit (location).

These findings support the research by Backhaus, Stone and Heiner (2002), which looked at the relationship between corporate social performance (CSP) and employer attractiveness. As discussed in section 2.2.4.1 of the literature review, the authors found that a poor record in certain areas of CSP had more of a negative effect while a positive record might add little. For example, firms with a poor environment record were likely to encounter hurdles in recruitment but having a strong environmental record added little

to an organisation's attractiveness. Similarly, demonstrating positive employee relations adds little, but having poor employee relations creates a negative recruitment image. If there are multiple weaknesses related to the different dimensions of CSP, there is a significant image problem for the firm (Backhaus, Stone & Heiner 2002).

5.3.1 The Role of Community Sponsorship

Nurses at all levels of experience did not appear to believe that community sponsorship by an employer strengthened the employer brand in any major way – at least from the outside, prior to employment. The belief was that it was a “given” because all private hospitals had contributed some form of sponsorship. A typical comment was: “No. I think it's good but it wouldn't be a deciding factor.” (FG – RNs, 9 mos experience). Another comment was that while it didn't have much of an impact prior to joining an organisation it was more important once inside. Interestingly, the directors of the hospital had the same view.

I don't know – if there were two potential employers I don't think looking at whether they sponsor or don't sponsor would make any difference. (E Director)

However, the executive director was clear that community sponsorship was not necessarily just about enhancing the “employer brand” but more about positive visibility to all stakeholders.

The advantage of community sponsorship for us is exposure for the organisation – gets your name possibly known – for example LPH1 sponsors the WA Symphony Orchestra – I don't think people go and work for them just because they do that but it does give them exposure. (E Director)

5.3.2 The Role of Word-of-Mouth

As discussed in the literature review, the concept and definition of reputation as a “collective assessment of a company’s ability to provide valued outcomes to a representative group of stakeholders” (Fombrun, Gardberg & Sever 2000, p. 243) has been criticised because different stakeholders may have different assessment of a company’s ability to “provide valued outcomes”. The concept of a universal reputation runs counter to the stakeholder view of different opinions depending on different stakeholders’ needs and differing world views (Cable & Graham 2000). Indeed, it seems clear from the interviews that individuals’ assessments of reputation were often based on interaction with people with a direct relationship to the hospital. When nurses had not already had a direct relationship prior to applying to work at the hospital (through their “pracs”), word of mouth from other nurses, lecturers, doctors and even friends who had been patients at the hospitals helped them form an opinion of the employer brand. Visits by recruitment staff also had an impact on some interviewees. The following comments from graduate enrolled nurses illustrate this view.

So how did you find out about [the case hospital] then?

Another [case hospital] worker.

I had no idea – I hadn’t been here before my interview and they came and gave a talk to us at TAFE about the benefits for staff.

Well I think [enrolled nurse recruiter] came and gave a talk and she actually knew more about it.

I had a friend here.

I think generally the community as a whole knows which are the better hospitals – and you’re doing prac and you’re out there amongst the other nurses there’s always comments made about different places – I think, you just pick up the vibe.

(FG – grad ENs)

Another of the ENs commented that it was word-of-mouth from her lecturer. “One of our lecturers at TAFE used to work here and she said it really was an excellent program.” (FG – grad ENs) While in other focus groups, when asked how they judged a hospital’s reputation the common response was: “Through word of mouth. Mainly word of mouth.”

Yeah – like a lot of people said to steer clear of LPH2 – SGH1 had a bad reputation. We know some staff there we had at Uni that were just awful – we were just like nup...(FG – RNs, 9 mos experience)

In the focus group with the undergraduate RNs, the damage word-of-mouth can cause to a reputation was witnessed first hand when one of the group had a bad story to tell about the case hospital which he said he had heard from a visiting lecturer. The other participants were incredulous but listened with interest.

But we had a lecturer in from [the case hospital] and she even said that some of the operations they do on old people are really unnecessary for their stage of life but they talk them into doing it and sometimes they even do botched up operations that could be done on purpose. (Laughter from rest of group).

Rest of the group: Is that true? Did she say that? I can’t believe she said that. (FG – undergrad RNs)

The importance of people’s network of influences in deciding upon employer attractiveness, as evidenced in the interviews, seems to give some weight to Rowley’s (1997) discussion of the network of influences on different stakeholders. As discussed in the literature review under section 2.3.2.4, Rowley (1997) suggested that firms do not just have dyadic ties with stakeholders but that stakeholders are also influenced by their relationships with each other.

The importance of personal experience and word-of-mouth in influencing respondents’ perceptions of reputation shows that an organisation’s relationships with its stakeholders

clearly influences its reputation in the community. Hence, the original question, which separates reputation and relationships could be a “false dichotomy”. Hutton’s (1999) initial article, which inspired the question, polarised the two concepts. Perhaps, it would be better for a company to concentrate on relationships first and then a positive reputation may follow via positive word-of-mouth.

5.3.3 Reputation versus Location

During the course of the research, the case hospital’s parent group also conducted a major research survey of the case hospital’s staff and staff at its other three hospitals in WA. The aim of the survey was to improve the short and long term recruitment and retention strategies for the hospital’s parent company in all occupational areas and for all age groups in their four hospitals across Western Australia. This was achieved through the distribution and analysis of a staff questionnaire, with the application of knowledge and skills in human resource management. The project was completed by a final year human resources business student. For reasons of confidentiality her entire report can not be included in this thesis. Objectives included obtaining data in relation to demographics, how employees look for jobs, how often employees change jobs, what would influence employees to leave the parent company, and what they value and view as important in their workplace. For a copy of the survey, please see the appendix. Staff, including administration staff, support staff, registered nurses, enrolled nurses, allied health staff and management, at the four hospitals owned by the case hospital’s parent company, were surveyed.

One of the key findings related to why the respondents decided to join the organisation. Analysis of the aggregate findings for all four hospitals found that location (60%) is the most influential factor for employees when deciding to join the parent company. Of course, location is something largely beyond the control of recruiters and marketers. This is followed by appeal of position (37.5%) and opportunity to apply or develop skills (30.5%). From these results it could be shown that personal functional benefits such as a

short travelling time, particularly when much of your workforce is female and part-time, may outweigh considerations of reputation.

However, the survey also found that for the case hospital, the most influential factor for employees when deciding to join the company was organisation reputation/image (40%), followed by location and appeal of position (both 37.8%) – quite a different result to the combined finding from all four hospitals. The case hospital's location is inner-city – not as convenient for those based in more affordable outer suburbs. At a glance this result could seem to show that reputation can outweigh functional benefits such as location if these benefits aren't as obvious. However, it does not necessarily negate the findings on the importance of relationships found through the qualitative research within this thesis. The hospital survey did not ask specific questions on the importance of relationships prior to employment, perhaps because this is not a factor covered in the literature.

5.3.4 Reputation Findings in Summary

As stated earlier, the first research question of this thesis was posed as: Is employer attractiveness more influenced by a company's relationships or its reputation? Prior to focusing on reputation, analysis of the findings found that relationships prior to and during employment can have a strong impact on employer attractiveness. Upon analysing the respondents' views on reputation it was found that a negative reputation, or negative visibility, can be a significant disincentive for at least some potential employees. Community sponsorship was not seen as an important factor influencing the attractiveness of a potential employer. However, such community initiatives may play a role in retaining existing staff by making them feel good about the organisations they work for. Word of mouth was found to contribute significantly to a positive (or negative) reputation implying that relationships and reputation are actually inter-related concepts.

5.4 Barriers to Successful Employer Branding

A thorough review of the literature has not yielded much discussion on what prevents organisations achieving an attractive employer brand. However, during this research there emerged some clear areas where the employer branding process was stalled or frustrated. Themes that emerged included the conservatism of the health profession, cross-functional confusion and loyalties of respective subcultures. Table 5.5 summaries these themes. These will now be examined in turn followed by a discussion of how integration may be a way of improving the employer branding process.

5.5 Key findings/themes on barriers to successful employer branding

Conservatism of health profession
Cross-functional turf wars
Loyalties to respective professional subcultures

5.4.1 Conservatism of the Health Profession

A recurring theme to emerge from the data is the conservative nature of the medical profession. This is potentially a serious barrier to the creation of a differentiated employer brand in the healthcare industry. The concepts of public relations, marketing and branding are seen by senior management in the medical and nursing areas as tainted and too commercial to be applied to healthcare.

From the marketing and public relations manager:

This absolutely stems from the nature of the profession. The real issue of the medical profession – they don't know how to promote themselves. When I first used the term brand no one liked it. The business savvy is not generally accepted openly – it is holding us back. Hospitals have to see themselves as a business.
(MPR Manager)

From the executive director, when asked about barriers related to employer branding:

Umm- Ourselves! If we don't tell people. That's one of the reasons we did that Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Award for family practice thing – we did that purely to get exposure. We don't promote ourselves. What we are looking at is doing more conferences – through the media, through positive stories, research, getting involved with the colleges, training. It's probably we're not good at self promotion – we were in the earlier days...doing those sorts of things take time but we are conscious of we've got to increase our profile – that's one of our objectives. (E Director)

From the director of clinical services:

The branding in health needs to be quite different from a general business organisation... (Director CS)

From the director of medical services:

I hate the term brand. When I hear about branding in health care I think about the Red Dot! I think about (former major healthcare company) and I don't like it! (Director MS) [Note: the Red Dot is a term loaded with more than one significant symbolic meaning. In Western Australia it is a budget, variety retail chain with connotations of being cheap and tacky. A 'red dot' was also used as a logo by a major former healthcare company across all its different business interests. This nation-wide branding exercise was not viewed positively by many in the health profession.]

The conservatism and resistance to the concept of “branding” by non-marketers appears to be given little attention in the marketing literature. However, the co-inventor of the term employer brand, Simon Barrow, writing with Richard Mosley, acknowledged the distrust and unease related to branding, going so far as to say that it has “become the

snake oil of modern management” (Barrow & Mosley 2005). Barrow and Mosley (2005) said that many respondents to their initial survey felt the concept of employer branding risked having negative overtones, with marketing seen as artificial and manipulative by HR. While Mosley and Barrow (2005) identified the gap in mutual understanding between HR and the marketing function they did not fully extend this thinking to the perhaps even wider gap of (dis)trust between marketing and other professions such as medicine or nursing. Hutton (2001) touched on the unease of using marketing concepts to promote healthcare organisations, suggesting that perhaps the marketing concept has been applied too broadly. As discussed in the literature review, tensions between marketing and HR can be gauged by some academic article titles such as ‘The marketing-human resources interface: Why a marketer might like to treat the director of Human Resources with respect’ (Adamson 2004). However, through the course of this research at the case hospital it appeared that marketing and HR worked reasonably well together and as a team may have felt frustrated by the conservatism of the health professions.

5.4.2 Cross-functional Confusion and Loyalties of Respective Subcultures

The cross-functional nature of the employer branding process has been discussed in Chapter 2 under section 2.1.3. The challenges that this represents for an organisation were certainly evident in interviews with key staff involved with the process, particularly the human resources manager and marketing and public relations manager. In fact, from the interviews conducted, it could be said that barriers often existed to producing the best employer brand because of misunderstandings between professional groups, which have already been briefly referred to. For example, the case hospital had participated in a major recruitment expo for nurses and following the expo a staff member phoned people who had registered their interest at the case hospital’s recruitment stand. The staff member was not a nurse but from “marketing/HR”. When the marketing and public relations manager was queried on whether or not the staff

member who did the follow-up phone calls to potential recruits was from nursing the following response was telling of the challenges involved.

No – she’s HR/marketing – it could have been a nursing person but you know, the age old, training hates HR, HR... I think that’s appalling...I’ve said to all of them you people are paid to get on together to do a job. But just on the side it’s just our own internal issues. Recruitment is everywhere – HR do a bit, training do a bit, nursing recruitment do a bit...Two people came in to me during the same week to talk to me about the same initiative at the uni and I said to them you people don’t talk – xx has been there, xx has been there, now you’re telling me you are going out there - people are going to think we’re mad so I have said to [the executive director] we need to tie it together – these people are going to think we’re crazy so it’s just about being strategic, looking at the reality and putting yourself in their shoes. (MPR Manager)

In speaking with the marketing and public relations manager it was clear there was a real desire to be “strategic” and integrated. However, this was impeded by the reality and frustrations of working across departments and the sheer size of the workload requirements, particularly with the then recent acquisition of new hospitals by the parent company. The marketing and public relations manager certainly was aware of the importance of her spending time on employer branding because of the serious situation of not being able to appropriately staff or even keep wards open due to the skills shortage.

So how important is it [employer branding to attract more nurses]? I have said to [the executive director] I don’t want to spend time on this, don’t get me wrong, but I don’t want to lose my job because we couldn’t fill wards either– so he said, okay if it’s that serious, yeah sure...

So for me it’s not hard to put together as long as I don’t have to run the whole thing – it’s bringing everybody together saying to people I don’t care what’s happened in the past or why you have this rift going on here – that’s not what

you're here to do, you're here to find a way to work together and work on one thing not on a 100 things for two months of the year. (MPR Manager)

The human resources manager also made mention of the challenges involved. When discussing the decision to use a non-nursing person to call up potential nursing recruits from the expo, she made a point that “nursing people are not good at marketing”.

So that was the reason? [ie, not to use a nurse to make the calls]

They're useless at it and they don't want to cold call and they don't want to...the fact that recruitment is across marketing, it's across HR, it's across training and development. It's caused me a lot of headaches and a lot of fights...I guess probably the grad programme is run by [the Director of Clinical Services] so it is very much her territory. (HR Manager)

The “territorial feuds” were certainly mentioned by both the HR manager and the marketing and public relations manager but were not commented on by the directors in the organisation, who perhaps felt they had more power and were not responsible for the hands-on implementation of employer branding policies.

The HR manager felt that relationship marketing to recruits was one of the case hospital's real points of difference and would help the organisation in its fight for talent. The HR manager said that she had fought to make this change to the recruitment process and had instituted follow-up calls to anyone who had expressed an interest in a position. However, it was a struggle to have this innovation implemented “because of the various players – “it's like it's not my territory – it's in your territory”.

There appears to be a clear cultural divide and lack of understanding between the professions of nursing on the one side and those charged with employer branding functions (HR and PR/Marketing) on the other. This was evident in comments from the manager in the key positions of HR and also the PR and Marketing Manager.

Well when you tell nurse managers you are going to be marketing, head hunting people, cold calling, and talking people into positions they think I am on another planet. (HR Manager)

The HR Manager acknowledged that the nursing profession perhaps felt uncomfortable with less traditional forms of recruitment but that it shouldn't stop the organisation from trying. For example, the HR Manager was considering teaming with or sponsoring a reproductive health education organisation at a "Sexpo" exhibition (because she had discovered through research that many young nurses actually visited this exhibition) as a way of cutting through the clutter of recruitment advertising. While recognizing the conservatism of the health profession, the HR Manager seemed to have a tenacity which meant she would achieve her recruitment goals, despite conservative protests or considerations, because she thought the organisation would benefit. There was almost a feeling of "fighting the good fight". "We need to be that radical – Sexpo is one example – but we need to be that radical...Cold calling and head hunting..." In the opinion of the HR Manager, this approach contrasts with the attitude of nursing professionals who appear to prefer hospitals not to be too aggressive in their employer branding campaigns.

Interestingly, the attachments to different professions and challenges of working across departments have also been researched in the area of culture and health care. A recent multi-perspective study of healthcare professionals by Morgan and Ogbonna (2008) noted that respective loyalties of professional subcultures may be stronger than loyalty to the organisation and may impede lay managers' authority to influence practices. Their study looked at two large healthcare organisations in the UK and examined the differing views of doctors, nurses and "non-clinical" managers. They found that, in the context of professional organisations, complex, multiple cultural values are frequently hierarchical and are commonly interpreted differently, with differentiated, fragmented and collective meanings (Philip Morgan & Ogbonna 2008). They even found that within sub-cultures there was fragmentation. Gummesson (1991) echoes this point, pointing out that a company does not consist of one unified culture with variations arising in groups, professions, functions and countries. With a similar theme, in the disciplines of

communications and marketing, the concept of integrated communication has been proposed as a way of avoiding contradictory messages and improving an organisation's "corporate story" (van Riel 2002).

The output of a wide range of communication specialists within organisations....does not always result in coherent communication messages. These various specialists are naturally inclined to consider their own departmental interests rather than the strategic interest of the total organisation (van Riel 2002, p. 163).

5.5 Breaking Down the Barriers? The Integration Evolution

As has been discussed in the literature review, the concept of integration has been discussed widely in the literature as imperative for successful management of corporate identity, corporate communications, corporate image and corporate reputation (see for example, Balmer & Greyser 2006; Kitchen & Schultz 2001; van Riel & Fombrun 2007). Of course, as Kitchen and Schultz (2001) pointed out, businesses do not suddenly decide to become "integrated", it is a slow, evolutionary process.

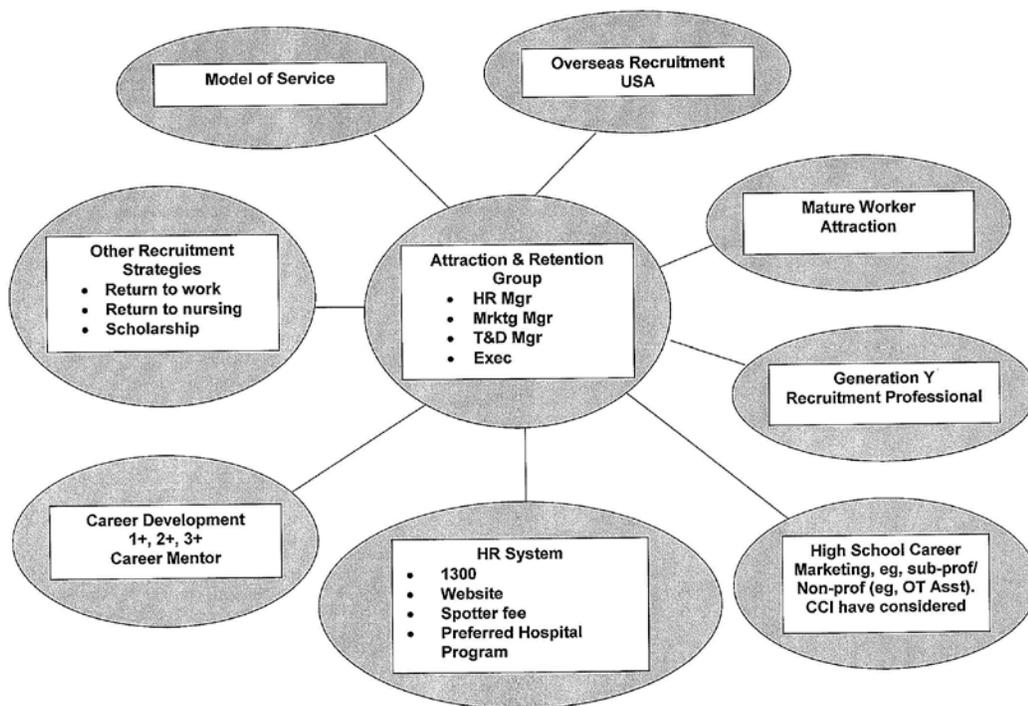
As has been shown, the concept of integrated communication could be seen as an ideal or normative view of an organisation's employer branding process. During the course of the research within the case hospital, the employer branding process evolved to a more integrated approach, largely driven by the HR manager. The HR manager had a vision of an "eight-legged octopus" for recruitment, and took time away from the operational day-to-day requirements at the hospital in late 2006 to spend a week researching and devising a strategy for the entire recruitment process. When first visiting the hospital, from my own viewpoint, recruitment and "employer branding" seemed to be across many different areas without a commonality or strategy behind it. This was acknowledged by the interviewees. Following the HR manager's week off, a strategic decision was made to have a specific group responsible for "attraction and retention".

This group includes: the HR manager, the marketing and PR manager, the training and development manager and the executive (that is, the executive director, the director of clinical services, the director of medical services and the director of corporate services). Below (Figure 5.1) is a pictorial representation of the group's responsibilities. This representation was provided by the HR manager to the researcher. As can be seen by the diagram, employer branding has been broken down in different ways, not necessarily by professions such as nursing but with some emphasis on recruitment across different generations, with specific attention given to mature workers, "Gen Y" workers and even to the pre-workforce age group of school aged teenagers.

The segmentation tactic relates back to the "names and faces approach" to stakeholder communication (McVea & Freeman 2005, p. 69). Instead of simply seeing current and prospective employees as one, large stakeholder group, the hospital's HR Manager identified segments according to age and life stage, focusing specifically on mature age workers (over 50s) and generation Y as well as new graduates, captured in the One Plus concept (now changed to "gradplus" – the year-long, post-graduate training and mentoring scheme for registered nurses provided by the case hospital). Another major evolution was that the case hospital's HR manager took on the role of state HR manager and recruitment for all the parent company's hospitals in Western Australia became part of her brief. Recruitment was co-ordinated at a State level rather than at an individual hospital level. However, applicants can still apply to work at one hospital. Whether this attempt to integrate will be completely successful, or will meet with its own frustrations, it is too early to tell. Clearly, the "conservatism" has not held back this integration too much, with the hospital recently using previously unheard of efforts (at least within the health profession) to recruit, such as prominent billboard advertising, an integrated careers and recruitment website, and a radio event with an outside broadcast focusing on the annual "international nurses day".

Figure 5.1: A diagrammatic representation of “the octopus” – the responsibilities of the Attraction and Retention group, as devised by the Human Resources Manager.

Within this model the central oval has the heading Attraction and Retention Group, the people charged with responsibility for all employer branding initiatives. Under this heading, the HR Manager is the human resources manager. The T&D Manager is the training and development manager. The Mrktg Mgr is the marketing and public relations manager. The “Exec” refers to the executive team of the executive director and the directors of clinical services, medical services and corporate services. Under the heading Career Development, 1+, 2+ and 3+ refers to the first, second and third year beyond graduation for enrolled and registered nurses. The HR System heading includes initiatives such as a toll-free number, a dedicated recruitment website and a fee given to staff who recruit a news staff member. Under the heading, High School Career Marketing, attention is being given to professional, sub-professional and non-professional roles. The CCI referred to under this heading is the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.



This chapter has provided the key findings of the research into employer branding, based on a case study of a major private hospital. The first research question “Is employer attractiveness more influenced by a company’s relationships or its reputation?” was reviewed and it was found that a company’s relationships with its stakeholders will have a direct influence on a company’s reputation. Therefore, the two concepts are more closely related than the existing literature would suggest. Relationships prior to (and during) employment were seen as an important factor in projecting an attractive employer brand, a factor not previously emphasised in the employer branding literature. It was found that perceptions of factors related to employer attractiveness did differ depending on experience and life stage. For undergraduates and recent graduates, the concept of “support” was key. Flexibility of work – the ability to “have a life outside work” - was also seen as important across all age groups. However, over-promising in recruitment was identified by all employees as a major source of disenchantment. Within the concept of relationships, the need for “respect” was a commonly identified component of a positive relationship. The concept of “reputation” was reviewed and it was found that negative visibility appeared to have a stronger impact than a positive reputation. Reputation was often formed from word-of-mouth from industry colleagues, hence the importance of developing strong relationships as a major step to ensuring a quality reputation. However, while not negating the findings on relationships, “reputation” was seen as an important concern when strong functional benefits, such as distance from employees’ homes, were not able to be offered due to an employers’ location. Within management there were several barriers to an effective employer branding process identified. These included a conservatism and mistrust of marketing within the health professions, cross-functional confusions and conflict, and loyalty to professions rather than the entire organisation. An evolution of integration across disciplines was observed within the case hospital as the research progressed and echoed the calls in recent literature for integration. The next, and final, chapter will contain a further discussion of the implications of the research.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Implications

6.0 Chapter Overview

In Chapter 1, the background to the research was presented. Given the gaps in current knowledge, the primary purpose of this study was defined in terms of a clearer contextual understanding of the employer branding processes and barriers to its implementation. Specifically outlined was the question of the relative influence of relationships versus reputation on perceptions of employer attractiveness. The research was described as a case study within the context of a private hospital setting in Western Australia, looking at employer branding to nurses. The contribution of this research to the academic literature was then presented.

Chapter 2 began with the extant literature on employer branding. This led to a review of the main relevant literature on branding. Two seemingly dichotomous approaches to employer branding – the concepts of relationship management and reputation management were explored - with relevant literature reviewed. Under the “relationship” concept, relevant literature on internal and relationship marketing, stakeholder theory, stakeholder relationship marketing and public relations as relationship management were reviewed. Related to “reputation”, literature on social identity theory, corporate reputation, corporate identity and corporate branding, and public relations as reputation management were explored.

Chapter 3 gave the context of the study and provided the research questions and objectives to be addressed.

Chapter 4 provided a detailed account of the research methodology used in this thesis. It began by placing the study in the context of broad research paradigms and focused on the qualitative research philosophy employed in the study. The case study as a form of

inquiry was discussed followed by a review of the specific data collection method used, namely depth interviews with individuals and focus groups as well as analysis of internal organisational documents, organisational advertising and websites. The methods of data analysis, questions of validity and ethical considerations were discussed.

Chapter 5 described the research findings. While this is an exploratory study it is noted that the role of relationships in contributing to the perceptions of employer attractiveness among both potential and existing employees is strong.

In this chapter the findings are further discussed and implications for both theory and practice are noted. There are a number of important implications for the development of employer branding theory, stakeholder theory and the academic discipline of public relations as well as business practice. These will be discussed in detail in this chapter which will also review the limitations of the study and present recommendations for future research.

6.1 Introduction

Brand image simply does not come from marketing and a brilliant, even memorable ad campaign. Brand image comes from living, breathing people. (Marken 2001)

In making the above comment, Marken (2001) discussed the need for public relations practitioners to be involved with branding, because of the importance of what different people (stakeholders) think of the organisation whether they be inside (such as employees) or outside the organisation (such as customers). Certainly this thesis has discovered that perceptions of employer attractiveness are often formed as a result of positive relationships and experiences. It has also been found that the cross-functional nature of employer branding means that many departments are needed for input into an organisational employer brand, including, but not limited to, senior directors, human resources, marketing, public relations, information technology and line managers and supervisors.

The tension between the concept of the brand being about advertising and marketing versus the lived experience is evident in recent “employer brand” awards, in which the author’s own university and place of employment (Curtin University) was “second best” in the State. The award was judged by members of the advertising and marketing sector. They acknowledged Curtin's award-winning “Curtinnovation” advertising campaign, and recent television advertisements, which feature global locations and recognized corporations available to Curtin graduates, when deciding the best employer brands. TMP Worldwide WA general manager Rowena Smith was quoted in WA Business News as praising Curtin's strong cohesive advertising and corporate branding strategy ('Curtin ranked second in best employer brand survey' 2008). However, these “employer brand awards” did not actually include any surveys of staff or potential staff on their perceptions of the organisation, which, if one looks at the Ambler and Barrow (1996) definition, one would presumably have to do to gain any real measurement of a top employer brand.

6.2 Managerial Implications

This study has several implications for managers which will be discussed in this section. First the importance of establishing and maintaining links with educational institutions (from secondary to tertiary level) will be reviewed followed by the necessity for the organisation to manage prospective and current employees’ moments of truth. The necessity for managing the application process, including the interview, will be noted as well as the difficulties associated with fulfilling the brand promise once an applicant becomes an employee. The challenges and opportunities of managing the cross-functional nature of employer branding will be noted and suggestions made for handling this process, specifically the concept of “flexible integration” (Christensen, Firat & Torp 2008).

6.2.1 Building relationships

Workers in healthcare, including nurses, doctors and the “allied health” professionals (physiotherapists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, social workers and dieticians) do have a relationship with hospitals during their practical work experience while still studying at university and this means that these organisations have the opportunity to begin marketing themselves early on to students and develop positive relationships. This relationship building, it can be surmised from the data, has a powerful influence on the potential employees’ views of an organisation’s employer brand. In practical terms, this has important implications for management. Building relationships with universities and TAFE colleges, where potential employees are trained, is an important step which may have been ignored, particularly by some private organisations. In practical terms, initiatives such as sponsorship of graduate prizes and funding of scholarships for students at an undergraduate level would be a simple way of building bonds with university students and lecturers. Guest lectures by key staff are another way of developing open lines of communication with students. It is worth noting that the case hospital has also recently recognised the importance of high schools, with marketing programmes initiated there.

The quandary for many employers is that they are unable to build a relationship prior to employment with their potential staff. Employees in many industries rarely have a chance to “try before they buy” as leaving a job early will cause potential loss of income and not look good on a resume. A company which has overcome this hurdle is Zappos, an on-line American shoe store (Coster 2008; Taylor 2008). Initially, the Zappos interview process is handled in an unusual and fun way, in order to match the company values with the recruit. At the outset, staff are given a a four-week training period that immerses them in the company’s strategy, culture, and obsession with customers (Taylor 2008). After approximately a week into the training recruits are offered payment for the time they have worked plus a \$1000 bonus, if they leave. The theory is that if the employee is willing to take up the company on the offer they obviously do not have the commitment to the company and don’t fit with the corporate culture. So, for Zappos

staff, they have built up a strong relationship with the company prior to employment – they have had a chance to try before they buy. Put another way, employees have had a chance to see whether the “brand promise” is met and if the fit is not perfect they have a low-risk, even rewarding, way of leaving. Clearly this approach would probably not work for hospitals if they are short of nurses but may be applicable or adaptable to other industries.

6.2.2 Moments of Truth

Relevant to the concept of relationship marketing, the research has identified the importance for organisations to manage job applicants’ “moments of truth” (Carlzon 1987), just as they manage service delivery to customers. This is particularly important in the health industry where the skills shortage is so acute. While job applicants are often thought of initially as “strangers” by organisations, the importance of fostering positive relationships, even prior to employment, has been revealed in this research. This philosophy, while seemingly common sense, has been largely ignored in areas such as stakeholder literature, where potential employees are commonly not listed as “stakeholders”.

Once job seekers actually apply, managing the application process, being mindful of the employer brand, is something not to be taken lightly by organisations. For example, handling the interview sensitively and making the applicant feel comfortable will potentially have an impact. The contrasting scenario, a rigid panel interrogation, may not elicit the best impression amongst potential employees of the employer brand. On-line application processes, too, while seemingly an improvement over paper-based options should not be too complex or daunting. All these improvements also point to a perhaps radical philosophical change for many organisations. The shift to viewing job applicants as “passive” job seekers who need to have the organisation sold to them had already been made by the HR Manager within the case organisation. Government organisations, with notoriously slow and complex procedures for job applicants, may well benefit from

reviewing their approach to recruitment in light of the empirical evidence found in this research.

6.2.3 Post-employment Brand Reality Check

A key management implication discovered through this research was the need to match the organisation's employer brand promise for applicants with its employer brand reality once an employee is inside. Organisations must be extremely careful not to over-promise as, from the empirical data, it has been shown that this can cause significant dissatisfaction amongst employees which may lead to less productivity or higher turnover. The temptation for organisations to over-promise may be high in the current climate of a skills shortage and with the perceived need by employees for "flexibility" in their work and a "work-life balance". The damage to relationships and employer brand equity by over-promising is in line with other recent research which identified the need for an accurate (successful) rather than aspirational (unsuccessful) employer brand (Moroko & Uncles 2007). The observation that, once employees have signed up, employer brands are experienced entirely "backstage", with no chance for maintaining "mystique" (Moroko & Uncles 2007), requires the employer brand process to be even more authentic than is required for product and service brands. A simple approach to lessen this disconnect is to involve employees in the development of employer branding advertising, website development and other forms of marketing communications. If employees from all levels are asked to articulate what is attractive about their place of employment, the level of authenticity would be much greater than images created by an advertising company of attractive models playing tennis or practising yoga positions.

The empirical data shows cynicism from some existing employees with regards to advertised employer brand functional benefits, such as workplace flexibility. There was also notable cynicism even from undergraduates with regards to organisational core values. This lack of a strong belief in the projected employer brand by employees below management level is mirrored in the perhaps controversial article by Christensen and

Cheney (2002) who discuss the self-absorption and self-seduction in the corporate identity game.

In a world saturated with symbols, where there is a great demand for every organisation to keep communicating, it is easy to think that each message and every campaign are taken seriously and received in the ways designed. But such messages are often malleable, unstable and of only ephemeral interest. In fact, in many cases, cynicism may be the most prominent outcome (Christensen & Cheney 2002, p. 267).

As indicated, empirical data shows support for Christensen and Cheney's (2002) point of view. From an employer brand perspective then, managers should not assume that the projected employer brand offered on websites, promotional brochures and in recruitment advertising is the same as the lived reality of the workers within an organisation. Therefore, it would be wise for all organisations to ask employees a simple question – does your experience of the organisation's employer brand live up to the advertised version?

6.2.4 Managing the Integration of Cross-functional Processes

The thesis also sought to uncover the potential barriers to successful implementation of employer branding. From an academic perspective this is important as there has been limited attention given to the difficulties in bringing to fruition a complex and cross-functional process and concept. While some academic work has hinted at the potential challenges and conflict across and between the disciplines of human resources and marketing, the mistrust of marketing and the concept of "branding" by other professions outside of these areas has received scant acknowledgement. The empirical findings of this case study showed a (usually) co-operative effort by marketing and human resources on the one side, but with some reservations from the medical and nursing professionals on the other. The conservatism of the health profession was found to be a major "barrier". Marketing professionals may also need to ask why other professions have a sceptical view of their activities. As has been discussed, the very term "branding" was viewed as having negative connotations by the senior executive from the health

discipline. Therefore, marketing and public relations professionals may need to consider adapting the language and approach of the profession to recognise other professions' reservations. A "softly, softly" approach may be what is called for and perhaps education of other professions of the merits of "branding".

The empirical data from this thesis appears to support the concept of flexible integration of marketing communications across a company. It is suggested from the data that a weak level of integration, observed early on in the case study, leads to frustrations, unclear messages, double up and even a disconnect between the brand promise and the brand reality. Calls for Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) are hardly new, with current marketing philosophy viewing IMC as imperative for organisational success (Chitty, Barker & Shimp 2005) and it has been trumpeted as *the* major communications development of recent times (Kitchen & Schultz 2003).

However, it must also be acknowledged that what is suggested from the empirical data in this thesis is that flexible integration must recognise the diverse voices within an organisation and, importantly, the lack of control by the marketing and public relations departments over much of what contributes to reputation, which are often the relationships formed between staff and their managers, supervisors and colleagues. Indeed in recent times, there have been dissenting voices which question a completely centralised and controlled approach to IMC (Christensen, Firat & Torp 2008). Christensen, Firat and Torp (2008) suggest traditional IMC is doomed to failure, due to the nature of organisations and the challenge of environmental complexity. Instead, they argued for "flexible integration" which necessitates an "organisation-wide sensitivity to diversity in voice, practices and perspectives and the ability to convey and incorporate such diversity across an organisational setting" (Christensen, Firat & Torp 2008, p. 438).

Traditionally, consistent perceptions amongst stakeholders of a corporate brand were seen as part of the "virtuous circle" of corporate branding as opposed to the alternative of diverse perceptions of stakeholders within a "vicious cycle" of corporate branding proposed by de Chernatony (2006), based on Kotter and Heskett (1992). While

integrated communication is a challenge for organisations it appears from the empirical data that in hospitals it is more challenging than most. Management literature and some nursing literature is cognizant of the challenges for hospitals with regards to integration and even striving for common goals and a common organisational identity among staff (see for example, 2004; Philip Morgan & Ogbonna 2008; Pratt & Rafaeli 1997). Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) suggested that the larger an organisation becomes the greater the chance that sub-identities will emerge that decrease identification with the corporate identity. In fact they singled out hospitals as being more likely to develop multiple identities than others, because of the multiplicity of specialists who come together to deliver health care (van Riel & Fombrun 2007).

However difficult the process may be, that is not to suggest a completely post-modern approach (Christensen, Torp & Firat 2005) of giving up integration and attempts at co-ordination all together. As has been discussed, the case organisation did evolve over time and a co-ordination effort (if not amounting to complete control) was made for key aspects of recruitment and retention. A decision was made, using the “octopus model”, to focus on key priorities and target different stakeholders using different measures such as age (Gen Y), experience (50 plus) and professional differentiation. Van Riel’s concept of Common Starting Points (CSPs) (van Riel 1995 ; 2003) may be one useful way for organisations to move towards flexible integration. CSPs can be “seen as central values... as a basis for the steering of the content of all forms of communication used by an organisation” (van Riel 2003, p. 168). Importantly, van Riel’s CSPs are not simply developed by the communications department or an outside advertising agency but have input from all participating areas.

6.3 Academic Implications

It has been suggested that a greater level of employee centred research be undertaken (Buoy 2002). This study has attempted an holistic approach which looks inside an organisation across departments, age ranges and roles of participants. The following

section will look at the key academic implications emerging from the thesis, including the role of relationships.

As has been stated previously, this study's first and key research question was: "Is employer attractiveness more influenced by a company's relationships or its reputation?" This question was inspired, in part, by Hutton's (1999) article on *The Definition, Dimensions and Domain of Public Relations*. In this article, as discussed under the literature review, the concept of public relations as reputation management is contrasted with the field being principally concerned with relationship management. Concepts such as reputation are not generally something that can be managed directly but are omnipresent and the overall result of a firm's or individual's behaviour (Hutton 1999).

Within this study, it has been found that, for potential and current employees, their *relationship* with current employees of the organisation is of utmost importance in understanding their perception of the organisation's employer attractiveness. The importance of these relationships often over-rode other important dimensions under the employer branding umbrella, such as financial benefits. It is important to note that the impact of financial benefits was outside of the confines of this study but due to the qualitative nature of the research, this finding emerged from the data. Respondents had given up potentially better financial benefits at other institutions because of pre-existing positive relationships gained during work experience or through interview. In contrast, *reputation* was often viewed in the negative sense ("I wouldn't work at x, because of its reputation"). Therefore, reputation appears to drive perceptions of employer attractiveness when it is a negative. Positive reputation is taken for granted unless disproved. This finding is in line with the findings of Backhaus, Stone & Heiner (2002) who noted that demonstrating positive employee relations adds little, but having poor employee relations creates a negative recruitment image (Backhaus, Stone & Heiner 2002) Reputation was also largely decided upon by word-of-mouth from other colleagues, again an indirect result of relationships. Fombrun and van Riel (2004) suggested that reputations are "magnets" and in their model of the magnetic properties

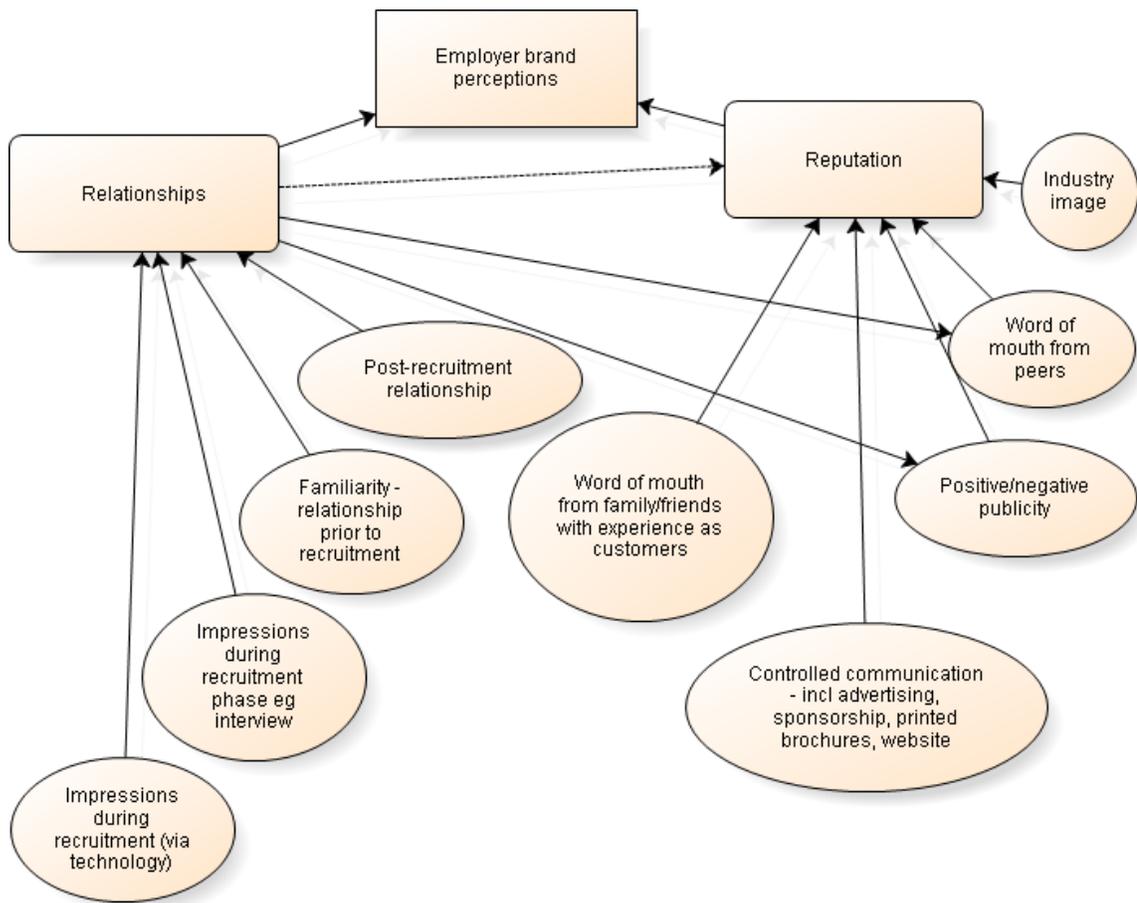
of reputation claimed that for employees reputation can “make jobs more attractive and motivate hard work”. From an academic viewpoint, this thesis has shown that the Fombrun and van Riel (2004) model is too simplistic and that more attention needs to be paid to the importance of relationships influencing employees’ views. If reputation is largely the result of good relationships relationships must come first in management’s priorities.

However, the role of public relations specialists within this management of relationships is still a tenuous question. Just how much impact public relations can have as a discipline on the management of relationships between prospective employee interviewees and their interviewers, for example, or current employees and their direct supervisors is questionable. From the empirical data it is suggested that public relations should, instead, look to one traditional area of focus, that of boundary spanning (eg. L Grunig 1990), which would include the co-ordination (if not control) of relationship management with stakeholders on the boundaries of the organisation and often given little focus, such as educational institutions, including schools, TAFE colleges and universities. Public relations practitioners should devote time to surveying, initiating, developing and maintaining relationships with groups in the community which provide the people who will become the most salient stakeholders – employees.

In the first article written on employer branding, Ambler and Barrow (1996) refer to Dowling’s (1994) model of factors affecting employees’ perception of corporate image and reputation. However, from the empirical research conducted for this thesis, it appears that what is missing from Dowling’s model is an appreciation of the impact employees’ relationships have on their image of an organisation. Similarly, prospective employees’ perceptions of an organisation’s employer brand appear to be affected by their personal relationships with the organisation during recruitment. This thesis therefore proposes a conceptual model which includes those factors which are important in forming employees’ and prospective employees’ perceptions of an employer brand. This model could provide the basis for future research on employer branding.

Figure 6.1

The role of relationships versus reputation in determining perceptions of employer attractiveness: How employer brand perceptions are formed in the health industry.



In looking at this model it should be noted that individuals are exposed to the various stages at different times. Therefore, like all relationships, there is a time component and perceptions will differ within the same person depending on what stage they are at in the relationship with the organisation. For example, the initial effects of reputation on recruitment may be outweighed by the post-recruitment relationship. And, as has been noted, the connect (or disconnect) between the promise offered in the controlled communication and the reality of being an employee will also have an effect.

The public relations profession's continued "identity crisis" (Bitter 1986) has long been acknowledged by academics. Indeed it is somewhat of a coincidence and surprise, given this study's focus, to have uncovered evidence that nursing and public relations have used the same expression of "profession with identity crisis" to describe themselves. Undergraduate textbooks on public relations note the multiple definitions of public relations and the diversity of these definitions (Tench & Yeomans 2006) and also note that PR as reputation management has gained currency (Newsom, Turk & Kruckeberg 2004). The suggestion arises from this study that any organisation should be concerned first with relationships. This thesis concurs, therefore, with Hutton's suggestion that "relationship management" should be the dominant paradigm for the field of public relations. However, one of the pillars of reputation management, "authenticity" (Fombrun & van Riel 2004) has been found to be of utmost importance in the management of the employer brand. Authenticity in any relationship should be seen as paramount.

These findings also, from an academic view, show the limitations of some of the literature on stakeholder theory, where many scholars appear to have, while championing the importance of employees, largely ignored the relevance of *prospective* employees as "stakeholders". The stakeholder literature is important because it does not place the shareholder or the customer as top of the organisation's priorities hence indirectly giving some weight to the study of employer branding. However, as discussed in the literature review, most stakeholder scholars have given *potential* employees scant, if any attention, with the main exception of Payne, Ballantyne and Christopher (2005) who developed the "six markets model", which addresses the complexity of stakeholder relationships and networks. This thesis concurs with this six-markets model which gives the "recruitment markets" considerable weight as a stakeholder group. Payne, Ballantyne and Christopher's model also recommends segmenting recruitment and internal markets further, according to function, job role, geography and level of seniority. Again this thesis has found considerable weight for segmentation - different

segments of the job-seeking market have been found to have different priorities and views of what makes an attractive employer brand

Turning to another area of stakeholder theory, evidence in this thesis shows the importance of the “network of influences” for stakeholders (Rowley 1997). Rowley suggested that organisations do not have simple dyadic ties with stakeholders but that stakeholders are also influenced by their relationships with other stakeholders (for example, relevant to this thesis, other nurses, doctors, family, friends and lecturers). The recent championing of the concept of “stakeholder relationship marketing” (Murphy et al. 2005; Payne, Ballantyne & Christopher 2005) shows that marketing is moving beyond the focus on the customer alone. The findings of this thesis show that marketers indeed must look well beyond the customer, particularly where there is a shortage of skilled employees to serve the customer.

Mitchell, Agle and Wood’s (1997) theory of stakeholder identification and salience (see section 2.3.2.2) clearly has relevance for the study of employer branding. However, there is scope to say that the three concepts of power, legitimacy and urgency proposed by Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) are interlinked. The urgency of recruiting nurses due to their shortage was noted by several of the key management staff interviewed, with the hospital management focusing valuable resources on expensive advertising and marketing efforts (even including billboard and radio advertising, previously unheard of tactics within hospital recruitment) to attract local staff as well as recruiting overseas in countries including Ireland, South Africa and Singapore. This urgency also, it could be argued, gave the nurses more power to demand such entitlements as paid parental leave (a positive functional and economic benefit for a mainly female workforce), free parking and wellness programmes. However, the historical power, legitimacy and urgency of the medical profession, noted in sociological and feminist writings (e.g. Porter 1992; Wearing 2004) means that hospitals are in a quandary with regards to two key employee/“contractor” stakeholders. If doctors, who give the hospital its revenue by bringing their patients with them, are seen as the most powerful and legitimate

“employee”/contractor stakeholders, how can hospitals then regard nurses equally as legitimate, urgent and powerful without offending the doctor elite?

From an academic viewpoint, this research has also uncovered a possible missing factor in the current employer attractiveness scale developed by Berthon, Ewing and Li (2005), at least when applied in recruitment of certain professions. As discussed under the literature review in section 2.1.2, the employer attractiveness scale does not mention the concept of flexibility. However, this was found to be an over-riding factor in employer attractiveness emerging from the empirical data within this thesis. Concepts of support, while touched on by Berthon, Ewing and Li (2005), would perhaps also need to be more emphasised in a field of employment where the recently graduated employee may be responsible for people’s lives. These missing factors also point to the suggestion, already touched on in this thesis, that different populations of potential employees will have different notions of employer attractiveness dependent on such factors as context, gender, life stage and responsibilities (for example young children or aged parents). The data gives weight to the “names and faces approach” to stakeholder theory (McVea & Freeman 2005, p. 69).

6.4 Limitations

This study has several limitations which have been discussed under the methodology section of this thesis. These limitations fall into a number of different categories including the fact that it is a single case study, its parameters, the problems with qualitative interviewing, the nature of interpretive research and the researcher’s own potential for bias. These categories will now be reviewed in turn.

As a single case study, the concept of generalisability is a difficult one, though as has been shown, the single case study can be used to generalise to theory. It can also be used to test theory, though this was not the objective of this research. This case study examines an organisation in a single industry with a particular population of employees and potential employees, as has been discussed under the context of the study. The very

fact that these employees have chosen that particular hospital may mean a private hospital may resonate with their own personalities more than working for a publicly funded organisation. Situational uniqueness must also be taken into account in the context of this study as one could expect different results perhaps under a different health system, for example, in Africa. As has been pointed out, one aspect of the situational context is that the high employment levels within Western Australia make the case an extreme one. The study did not set out to examine the impact of financial benefits, another limitation of the research. The importance of “culture” was also beyond the original parameters of this study and is clearly a key consideration.

Qualitative interviewing always has some degree of risk regarding credibility and truthfulness of data gathered from respondents. This is especially true in the case of the senior managers and directors interviewed for this study as, although they are not easily identifiable outside the organisation, within the organisation (which obviously has access to this thesis) they will be identifiable to their colleagues. For these managers and directors, then, there were some risks involved in being perfectly honest and constructively critical of their own organisation and other departments within it. While such problems cannot be eradicated, the contrasting responses of the managers, directors and the different levels of nursing staff and undergraduates provided useful juxtapositions as did publicity materials and internal documents generated by the hospital. The triangulation of the data allowed responses to be viewed in the light of observations from other participants, therefore enhancing the ability of the researcher to interpret data accurately. In the final stages of the thesis write-up, “member checking” was used with the HR Manager who concurred with the findings of the key themes.

The analysis of the study was inevitably interpretive, a situation synonymous with qualitative research. While this is not necessarily a negative phenomenon, it must be acknowledged that the researcher’s values and life experiences potentially influenced the interpretation of the data. The researcher’s background in marketing and public relations also means that her own worldview may be coloured by personal experiences. As discussed previously, I have been conscious throughout of the potential for bias and

have used member checking (with key informants at the hospital) and peer debriefing (checking key themes with my supervisor, for example) to attempt to minimise the effects of my own influences on the data.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

This research started in 2006 and began as an investigation of employer branding processes and outcomes within a case organisation, namely a large private hospital in Western Australia and in a limited sense beyond its boundaries, looking at the views of a cross-section of potential employees. With employer branding being an interdisciplinary process, the research, as a consequence, answered the relatively recent call to attempt an insight into the internal organisational processes which may be the key to understanding why many integration projects fail (Christensen, Firat & Torp 2008). However, while this single case-study allowed for an in-depth analysis, which could be less achievable in a quantitative survey across organisations or even multiple case studies, it also opened the door to questions and theories which need to be researched across the industry and other industries and locations.

An initial research agenda would be to replicate the study in several cases across different hospitals of different sizes and geographic locations. Within the Australian health care industry, it would also be useful to replicate the study across different types of hospitals, such as Government and not-for-profit Church-run hospitals. As the case hospital is a “for-profit” hospital, with its parent company listed on the stock exchange, it would be useful to see if the challenges of the employer branding process were similar in hospitals where profit is not a primary business objective. In Government hospitals, with potentially more limited money to spend on employer branding efforts, there may be more unease with the concept of marketing applied to recruitment than within a for-profit organisation. Similarly, the religious ethos behind many major Church hospitals may be at odds with the concepts of marketing and branding (although religious organisations are certainly becoming more marketing oriented). Another reason for extending the study is that, for some staff interviewed, the case hospital facilities and its

(privately insured) clientele were cited as making it an attractive employer which would obviously not be key motivators for those attracted to work in Government hospitals. On the other hand, Government and Church-based hospitals have an advantage not available to for-profit organisations due to taxation laws in Australia - the ability to offer extremely attractive salary packaging benefits. Just how important this financial benefit is as an element of the employer brand would be an avenue worth exploring.

Situational uniqueness must be taken into account in the context of this study. The context of the Australian healthcare system, with its mix of private for-profit healthcare providers, private not-for-profit healthcare providers and Government healthcare providers is arguably different to any other healthcare system across the world. However, the challenges of recruiting skilled nursing and other professional health workers is not just Australia's problem. A study which looks at "employer branding" within hospitals across different countries could show the influence of context, for example in the UK, where the National Health Service is so entrenched compared to the United States of America with its emphasis on employer-sponsored private health cover.

While some of the findings were industry specific, relevant to the apparent "identity crisis" within the field of nursing, there appears potential for many of the key findings to be relevant to other industries. However, whether all the employer attractiveness factors discovered in this thesis are applicable to other industries needs to be researched. Further research into the relative importance of relationships prior to and beyond employment could be conducted in unrelated industries, including for example, but not limited to, recruitment and retention in the fields of marketing and public relations. At university level, an example of more emphasis on engagement with industry and the value of industry placements for undergraduates comes from the author's own university where PriceWaterhouse Coopers, Bankwest, the RAC and Australia Post have teamed with the Curtin Business School to offer industry scholarships. Scholarship winners combine study with paid work and the support of a mentor. At the University of WA, engineering firm Monadelphous has also formed a partnership with that University's engineering school. How industry placements affect employer attractiveness is an under-studied area.

As has been discussed, in a separate study by Moroko and Uncles (2007), one of the key attributes of an attractive employer brand identified was being “accurate” or authentic and similar findings were elicited in this thesis. A longitudinal study across industries, showing employees prior to recruitment, during recruitment phase and post recruitment would be useful in seeing the effect of the perceived authenticity of employer branding. A more controlled, but perhaps difficult, study could be in the form of an experimental design for some, if not all, of the research propositions outlined below. For example, different groups could be asked to participate in two different styles of application process and then asked to rate the company’s employer brand.

6.6 Research Propositions

Given the management and academic implications presented in this chapter it is proposed that a more generalisable study would do well to further investigate key findings discovered in this exploratory study. This section therefore puts forward a series of testable research propositions based on the findings of this study.

RP1

Impressions during recruitment via impersonal communications will have an impact on employer brand perceptions.

RP2

Impressions during the recruitment phase via personal communications are related to employer brand perceptions.

RP3

The relationship with an organisation prior to recruitment will have an impact on employer brand perceptions.

RP4

Post-recruitment relationships with supervisors and colleagues will have an impact on employer brand perceptions

RP5

The degree of fit between the brand promise and its delivery will have an impact on employer brand perceptions

6.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the conclusions of this thesis. Managerial implications were discussed which included developing links with employees before their employment, managing moments of truth, ensuring the brand promise is delivered, not assuming the advertised employer brand matched the lived experience and managing the integration of a clearly cross-functional process. The academic implications include ramifications for the identity of public relations and current thinking on stakeholder theory and relationship marketing as well as a re-evaluation of the current employer attractiveness scale. Recommendations for future research were outlined concluding with suggested research propositions. The concept of employer branding applied in an industry which has serious reservations and suspicions of marketing proved a fruitful area for study. It is hoped this exploratory study will draw attention to the complex and cross-functional nature of any marketing or public relations activity and provide inspiration for future researchers into the field of employer branding and beyond.

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Appendix I

Letter to Executive Director

January 12 2006

XXXX

Dear

My field of study at Curtin Business School is in the area of employer branding and employer attractiveness. You may be aware that “employer branding” has become something of a hot topic in the fields of marketing and human resources. At the same time, the skills shortage – particularly in healthcare – has been well reported in the business press and practitioner journals. Of course you are facing it every day in the hunt for excellent nurses and other health care workers. As a former employee, I am keenly aware that XXX is exceptionally innovative in attracting – and retaining – employees. Intuitively I would suggest that XXX’s is a leader in employer branding.

Academics are only just starting to research this important topic. The first mention of employer branding was by Ambler and Barrow in their 1996 paper “The Employer Brand”, published in the *Journal of Brand Management*. While much has been written conceptually on employer branding little actual research has been conducted where it matters most – with employees. Most of the work so far has been limited to asking final year University students what they think would make an attractive employer brand. As a research topic it intrigued me to discover what older, more skilled workers sought in an employer. Obviously, with my background in health, I immediately thought of hospitals as an area of research.

With this in mind I am writing to request access to some XXXX staff to find out what makes a stellar employer brand. One aspect of my research will be from the public relations standpoint – is it the relationship employees have with an organization or is it the organisation’s reputation that is important? Importantly from an ethical and privacy point of view, I will do not seek to identify participants in the study or the hospital itself. What I want to do is find out the common features of an excellent employee brand.

So what’s in it for XXXX? I believe this research could well help XXXX’s find out exactly what prospective employees value most. Intuitively we might think we know – but this research will help to clarify what is important to mature and talented workers. I know that XXXX is committed to research and to being the best in healthcare. I look forward to hearing from you on this important matter and I am certainly available to answer more detailed questions on the logistics and timing of the research.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Archer

Appendix II

Questions for Final Year Nursing Students

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for your time today allowing me to talk with you for my research. You may be aware that “employer branding” has become something of a hot topic in the fields of marketing and human resources. At the same time, the skills shortage – particularly in healthcare – has been well reported in the business press and practitioner journals. With this in mind I want to explore the notion of what RNs look for in the employer brands they are exposed to.

1. What would make an employer “attractive” to you?
2. What is most important?
3. What are the key factors you consider when deciding where to work?
4. Do you regard community involvement and sponsorship as important in choosing where to work?
5. Is an organisation’s reputation important to you when choosing an employer?
6. How do you assess that reputation?
7. Does an organisation’s advertising affect your intentions to work for them?
8. Does an organisation’s positive publicity affect your intentions?
9. What about negative publicity?
10. Do you ever consciously look at an organisation’s “Core Values” before deciding whether or not to work for them?
11. The term “family friendly” seems to pop up a lot lately – is this important to you in deciding where to work?
12. What does this mean?
13. How important is salary and employment conditions to you when considering where to work?
14. What about training opportunities?

15. Are promotion prospects important when considering a position with a company/or deciding to remain?
16. What about an organisation's perceived innovativeness?
17. Does the social side of an organisation have relevance – ie how much you feel part of a team and have the opportunity to develop friendships outside work?
18. Do you believe organisations over promise in their recruitment campaigns?
19. What do you understand the term “brand” to mean?
20. Have you heard of the term employer branding?
21. Do you think certain hospitals have a stronger “employer brand” than others?
22. Do you think some employer brands in health stand out more than others?
23. Are there any other comments you would like to share with me regarding “employer attractiveness”.

Appendix III

Questions for Enrolled Nurses, Registered Nurses, and Clinical Nurses

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for your time today allowing me to talk with you for my research. You may be aware that “employer branding” has become something of a hot topic in the fields of marketing and human resources. At the same time, the skills shortage – particularly in healthcare – has been well reported in the business press and practitioner journals. With this in mind I want to explore the notion of what RNs look for in the employer brands they are exposed to.

1. Could you please tell me a little about your experience in healthcare?
2. What would make an employer “attractive” to you?
3. What is most important?
4. What are the key factors you consider when deciding where to work?
5. Do you regard community involvement and sponsorship as important in choosing where to work?
6. Is an organisation’s reputation important to you when choosing an employer?
7. How do you assess that reputation?
8. Does an organisation’s advertising affect your intentions to work for them?
9. Does an organisation’s positive publicity affect your intentions?
10. What about negative publicity?
11. Do you ever consciously look at an organisation’s “Core Values” before deciding whether or not to work for them?
12. The term “family friendly” seems to pop up a lot lately – is this important to you in deciding where to work?
13. What does this mean?
14. How important is salary and employment conditions to you when considering where to work?

15. What about training opportunities?
16. Are promotion prospects important when considering a position with a company/or deciding to remain?
17. What about an organisation's perceived innovativeness?
18. Does the social side of an organisation have relevance – ie how much you feel part of a team and have the opportunity to develop friendships outside work?
19. Do you believe organisations over promise in their recruitment campaigns?
20. Have you ever been disappointed with the reality once joining an organisation?
21. What do you understand the term “brand” to mean?
22. Have you heard of the term employer branding?
23. Do you think certain hospitals have a stronger “employer brand” than others?
24. Do you think some employer brands in health stand out more than others?
25. Are there any other comments you would like to share with me regarding “employer attractiveness”.

Appendix IV

Questions for Medical Specialists

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for your time today allowing me to talk with you for my research. You may be aware that “employer branding” has become something of a hot topic in the fields of marketing and human resources. At the same time, the skills shortage – particularly in healthcare – has been well reported in the business press and practitioner journals. With this in mind I want to explore the notion of what specialists look for in the employer brands they are exposed to.

1. What would make an organisation “attractive” to you to work at?
2. What is most important?
3. What are the key factors you consider when deciding where to work?
4. Do you regard community involvement and sponsorship as important in choosing where to work?
5. Is an organisation’s reputation important to you when choosing where to work?
6. How do you assess that reputation?
7. Does an organisation’s advertising affect your intentions to work for them?
8. Does an organisation’s positive publicity affect your intentions?
9. What about negative publicity?
10. Do you ever consciously look at an organisation’s “Core Values” before deciding whether or not to work for them?
11. The term “family friendly” seems to pop up a lot lately – is this important to you in deciding where to work?
12. What does this mean?
13. What about perks offered by an organisation – such as close parking bays, free tickets etc?
14. How important is an organisation’s status to you?

15. What about training/research opportunities?
16. What about an organisation's perceived innovativeness?
17. Does the social side of an organization have relevance – i.e. how much you feel part of a team and have the opportunity to develop friendships outside work?
18. Have you ever been disappointed with the reality once joining an organization?
19. What do you understand the term “brand” to mean?
20. Have you heard of the term employer branding?
21. Do you think certain hospitals have a stronger “employer brand” than others?
22. Do you think some employer brands in health stand out more than others?
23. How much do you “trust” the organisations you work at? Does the “for profit” tag worry you?
24. Who impacts the most on your opinion of the organisation?
25. How committed do you think the organisation is to you?
26. Are there any other comments you would like to share with me regarding “employer attractiveness”?

Appendix V

Questions for Executive Director

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for your time today allowing me to talk with you for my research. You may be aware that “employer branding” has become something of a hot topic in the fields of marketing and human resources. At the same time, the skills shortage – particularly in healthcare – has been well reported in the business press and practitioner journals. With this in mind I want to explore the notion of what YOU THINK nurses and specialists look for in the employer brands they are exposed to.

- 1 What do you think would make an organisation “attractive” to health professionals to work at?
- 2 What is most important – what would really matter?
- 3 What are the key factors you think health professionals would consider when deciding where to work? Do you think it would be different for nurses and doctors?
- 4 Do you think they would regard community involvement and sponsorship as important in choosing where to work?
- 5 Do you think they would consider an organisation’s reputation as important when choosing where to work?
- 6 How do you think they would assess that reputation?
- 7 Do you think an organisation’s advertising would affect their intentions to work for an organisation?
- 8 What about an organisation’s positive publicity?
- 9 What about negative publicity?
- 10 Do you think nurses would consciously look at an organisation’s “Core Values” before deciding whether or not to work for them?
- 11 The term “family friendly” seems to pop up a lot lately – is this important to people in deciding where to work?

- 12 What does this mean?
- 13 What about perks offered by an organisation – such as close parking bays, free tickets etc – do you think that’s important to doctors and nurses?
- 14 How important do you think an organisation’s status would be?
- 15 What about training/research opportunities?
- 16 What about an organisation’s perceived innovativeness?
- 17 Does the social side of an organization have relevance – i.e. how much they feel part of a team and have the opportunity to develop friendships outside work?
- 18 Do you think staff are ever disappointed with the reality once joining an organization?
- 19 What do you understand the term “brand” to mean?
- 20 Have you heard of the term employer branding?
- 21 Do you think certain hospitals have a stronger “employer brand” than others?
- 22 Do you think some employer brands in health stand out more than others?
- 23 Are there any other comments you would like to share with me regarding “employer attractiveness”?
- 24 Do you think hospitals should care about their employer brand?
- 25 What are the barriers to getting the best employer brand out there in the market place?
- 26 Do you think employer branding should rest with HR or marketing?

APPENDIX VI

Sample Questions for Directors and Managers

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for your time today allowing me to talk with you for my research. You may be aware that “employer branding” has become something of a hot topic in the fields of marketing and human resources. At the same time, the skills shortage – particularly in healthcare – has been well reported in the business press and practitioner journals. With this in mind I want to explore the notion of what YOU THINK nurses look for in the employer brands they are exposed to.

1. What do you think would make an organisation “attractive” to health professionals to work at?
2. What is most important – what would really matter?
3. What are the key factors you think health professionals would consider when deciding where to work? Do you think it would be different for nurses and doctors?
4. Do you think they would regard community involvement and sponsorship as important in choosing where to work?
5. Do you think they would consider an organisation’s reputation as important when choosing where to work?
6. How do you think they would assess that reputation?
7. Do you think an organisation’s advertising would affect their intentions to work for an organisation?
8. What about an organisation’s positive publicity?
9. What about negative publicity?
10. Do you think nurses would consciously look at an organisation’s “Core Values” before deciding whether or not to work for them?
11. The term “family friendly” seems to pop up a lot lately – is this important to people in deciding where to work?
12. What does this mean?

13. What about perks offered by an organisation – such as close parking bays, free tickets etc – do you think that’s important to doctors and nurses?
14. How important do you think an organisation’s status would be?
15. What about training/research opportunities?

16. What about an organisation’s perceived innovativeness?
17. Does the social side of an organization have relevance – i.e. how much they feel part of a team and have the opportunity to develop friendships outside work?
18. Do you think staff are ever disappointed with the reality once joining an organization?
19. What do you understand the term “brand” to mean?
20. Have you heard of the term employer branding?
21. Do you think certain hospitals have a stronger “employer brand” than others?
22. Do you think some employer brands in health stand out more than others?
23. Are there any other comments you would like to share with me regarding “employer attractiveness”?
24. Do you think hospitals should care about their employer brand?
25. What are the barriers to getting the best employer brand out there in the market place?
26. Do you think employer branding should rest with HR or marketing?
27. Who does what?
28. How does it work now?

Appendix VII Sample Information Sheet

Information sheet for Nurses on Catherine Archer's research project

Re: Research into attracting the best in healthcare – “employer branding”

Thank you for your time today to allow me to interview you for my research. I have approached you as a registered nurse – and therefore a sought-after employee - to participate in a focus group for approximately 50 minutes.

I am interviewing ENs and RNs in focus groups to see what they value in the hospitals they work at and why they chose to work where they do.

The research will help managers improve their strategies for attracting and retaining the best people – whether they be nurses or others working in the health field.

I have an interview guide with questions on the above topic. However I am keen for you to share any other thoughts on the topic. You may choose to answer or not answer any of the questions in the interview. Responses will be treated *confidentially* and *anonymity* will be respected and *assured*. Participation is voluntary.

To assist in recording the comments each interview will be taped and typed at a later date in a transcript. Your comments will be used to identify themes from the interviews. The data will only be available to the researcher. It will not be possible to identify individual respondents in any material disseminated outside the immediate research team. Copies of the research report will be made available to supervisors and the University library. The research will be published in academic journals and will also be of use for industry in determining how to attract the best employees.

Should you have any queries on this research, please feel free to contact:

Researcher: Catherine Archer, ph 9266 2433, Catherine.Archer@cbs.curtin.edu.au

Supervisor: Dr Nigel de Bussy, ph 9266 2855, Nigel.debussy@cbs.curtin.edu.au

Kind regards

Catherine Archer
Masters by Research

Appendix VIII
Information sheet for doctors, directors and managers that were interviewed

Information sheet for XXXX on Catherine Archer's research project

Re: Research into attracting the best in healthcare – “employer branding”

Thank you for your time today to allow me to interview you for my research.

The research will help managers improve their strategies for attracting and retaining the best people in healthcare.

I have an interview guide with questions on the above topic. However I am keen for you to share any other thoughts on the topic. You may choose to answer or not answer any of the questions in the interview. Responses will be treated *confidentially* and *anonymity* will be respected and *assured*. Participation is voluntary.

To assist in recording the comments each interview will be taped and typed at a later date in a transcript. Your comments will be used to identify themes from the interviews. The data will only be available to the researcher. It will not be possible to identify individual respondents in any material disseminated outside the immediate research team. Copies of the research report will be made available to supervisors and the University library. The research will be published in academic journals and will also be of use for industry in determining how to attract the best employees.

Should you have any queries on this research, please feel free to contact:

Researcher: Catherine Archer, ph 9266 2433, Catherine.Archer@cbs.curtin.edu.au

Supervisor: Dr Nigel de Bussy, ph 9266 2855, Nigel.debussy@cbs.curtin.edu.au

Kind regards

Catherine Archer
Masters by Research