

Summary: Four schools of thought on internal branding

Type of model: Summary
 Author(s): Bram den Engelsen
 Domain: Internal branding

Table 1: The four schools of thought on internal branding according to Den Engelsen.

	Mission school	Strategy school	Communication school	Organisation school
<i>Kind of approach</i>	Total approach	Total approach	Breaking ground for external branding	Breaking ground for external branding
<i>For whom</i>	Believers	Believers	Pragmatists	Pragmatists
<i>Keyword</i>	Corporate religion	Brand-based strategic management	Selling the brand inside	Brand behaviour (employees as brand builders)
<i>Tools</i>	- Leadership - Internal communication - Education and training	Wide array	Internal marketing and communication	- HRM - Internal communication - Systems - Programme management
<i>Emphasis</i>	Emotional brand meaning	Emotional brand meaning also translated into instrumental meaning	Emotional brand meaning	Emotional and instrumental brand meaning

When asked what internal branding entails, Bram den Engelsen points out that there are several possible answers to that question, depending on your point of view or ‘convictions’. People’s views are often grounded in people’s professional background and their ideas on the role of companies and leadership.

Den Engelsen lists four views or schools of thought, each with their own interpretation of internal branding:

- The mission school of thought: this school of thought on internal branding is mainly found in companies where corporate religion plays an important role. The basic premise here is a so-called corporate belief, i.e. the idea that the company only does business with employees and customers that are a value match for the company. CEOs of such companies are often a prototypical or role model to follow, which is reflected in visionary leadership. The company is then more or less a totalitarian system where shared values

are conveyed to employees through inspiring leadership, role model behaviour, group processes, corporate storytelling etc. When recruiting new staff, competencies can even play second fiddle to the required mentality.

- The strategy school of thought: where the mission school of thought bestows binding factor status on the highest echelon of a company, which holds all departments below it together, the strategy school of thought considers the brand to be the binding factor. This basically means that the values we consider important in the relationship with customers steer all business processes, as well as influence how employees are managed. The keyword for this school of thought is brand-based strategic management. Where the mission school of thought emphasises values that are considered relevant internally, the strategy school is more about values that are on the interface between the company and its environment.
- The communication school of thought: this school of thought departs from the idea that the methods and techniques from external branding can also be applied to a company's own staff. This approach was known as internal marketing in the early 1990s. This school of thought is best represented in a 2002 Harvard Business Review article by Colin Mitchell: 'Selling the brand inside'. Seeing as internal branding mostly limits itself to (internal) communication, this view has turned out to be rather unsuccessful. In extreme cases, external communication may even be used to influence a company's staff. A classic example of that is the e-business campaign IBM ran in the 1990s.
- The organisation school of thought: this school of thought acknowledges, like the communication school, that employees are all-decisive for the brand image. If employees fail to live up to the externally communicated proposition, that will undermine the brand's credibility. But the organisation school goes further than the communication school of thought in that it also acknowledges that a range of internal conditions (such as good stewardship and HRM) affect whether the employees' role of brand builders actually works out. This school of thought is described in Pringle and Gordon's book *Brand Manners* (2011).

Reference(s)

Engelsen, B. den (2002), De medewerker als merkbouwer: vier visies op internal branding [Employees as brand builders: four schools of thought on internal branding]. Tijdschrift voor Marketing, vol.36, no.10, p.72-76. *

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