

The Impact of Person-Organization Fit on the Corporate Brand Perception of Employees and Customers

One of the major problems companies face in the marketplace is a gap existing between the corporate brand values as perceived by the customers and the corporate brand values which were declared as such by the management. It is shown here that Person-Organization Fit (POF) – i.e. the fit between organizational values and the individual values of the employees – can play a significant role in closing that gap. In this research the impact of POF has been viewed from an external perspective.

Conclusions derived from the research are that employees' POF positively affects the extent to which they perceive their corporate brand values as congruent with those which were declared by the management and that this brand perception level of employees positively affects the perception level of the customers. A high perception level of customers means a higher trust in the brand and in the corporate which stands behind it, and the result is a more powerful brand.

INTRODUCTION

According to Aaker (1991) a brand is a set of perceptions which form the differentiation among brands. The brand perception determines the expectation the customer has of a brand, expectation which presents the customer feelings towards a very specific experience that is promised by the branded product. Herman (2001) adds that a brand can create psychological or sociological benefits which are consequences of fantasy, such as a Mercedes car which satisfies benefit that is far beyond the driving experience itself. He calls all these kinds of benefits "values" or "added-values" and emphasizes that the customer expects to get benefits on the basis of the brand values. He also adds that a realization of the brand strategy depends on the fit between the brand values and promises, on the one hand, and the way the customers perceive the brand, on the other. So, the lower the gap between the brand values and promises on the one side and the brand values perception of the customer on the other, the better the brand performance.

The main question is, therefore, what might close, or at least narrow that gap, especially in the case of a corporate brand. There is a big difference between line branding and corporate branding (Harris & de Chernatony 2001); while line branding engages the customers, distributors and only a few of the corporate staff, a corporate branding is related to the stakeholders as a whole and a large part of the corporate employees are involved in the corporate brand (De Chernatony 1999). McDonald, de Chernatony & Harris (2001) add that the corporate brand is highly influenced by the relationships developed between the customers and the organization's staff, than a line brand, especially in the case of service brands. But, in order to enhance the employees' identification with the corporate brand and get their support, the corporate brand values have to reflect the corporate values and culture. If there is

a gap between the corporate brand values (the “on stage”), and the actual corporate values (the “back stage”), it will be perceived by the employees as a lie, encourage cynicism and finally damage their identification with the corporate brand. This misbelief of the employees will be transferred to the customers and undermine their belief in the corporate brand, which will eventually lead to an increasing gap between the brand values and the way customer perceive it, and thus decreasing customer loyalty (Herman 2001).

The concept of Person-Organization Fit (POF) deals with the congruence between the employee’s own personal values and the values of the organization, according to the employee’s perception. Chatman (1989), O’Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell (1991), Cable & Judge (1996), Chan (1996), Kristof (1996), Cable & DeRue (2002), and Silverthorne (2004) all determined that the greater the POF, the greater is the employees’ satisfaction which leads to a greater commitment with the organization and its goals.

Harris & de Chernatony (2001) were more specific regarding the relations between the POF and brand success, by determining as follows:

- the greater the congruence between the corporate values and the corporate brand values, the better is the brand performance;
- the greater the congruence between the employees’ personal values and the corporate values (the POF), the better is the brand performance;
- the greater the congruence between the employees’ personal values and the corporate brand values, the better is the brand performance.

A strong POF means, therefore, a higher perceived congruence between the organizational values and the individual values of the employee and also a high fulfillment of the corporate values by the employees. Therefore their perception of the corporate brand values will be close or even similar to the brand values of that corporation as declared by the management, and their identification with the brand values will be high too.

To sum up, a higher POF will lead to a higher identification of the employees with the corporate ob-

jectives and values as well as to more readiness to make more efforts and do extra work; so, while creating a resemblance between the corporate brand values and the corporate values, the employees will be more identified with the corporate brand values and thus will be more willing to transfer the brand values “as is” to the customers and as a consequence the customers’ perception of the corporate brand will be

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the same or close to the corporate brand perception of the employees. As a result, the corporate brand perception of customers will be much alike the corporate brand values and promise, and as a consequence the brand position will be strengthened.

PERSON-ORGANIZATION FIT

A useful means for assessing and measuring the sense of mission is the Person-Organization Fit (POF). Many researchers dealt and are still dealing today with the POF notion. Posner, Kouzes & Schmidt (1985), Chatman (1989), O’Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell (1991), O’Reilly & Chatman (1986), Schneider, Goldstein & Smith (1995), Cable & Judge (1996), Kristof (1996), Chan (1996), Judge & Cable (1997), Cable & DeRue (2002), Siegall & McDonald (2004) all related to the POF as values congruence between individual values and organizational values. According to Bretz & Judge (1994) POF had been examined in four perspectives; the first is the degree to which individual knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) matched job requirements; the second definition of POF is the degree of congruence between individual needs and organizational structures; according to the third perspective POF has been defined as the match between individuals’ values and organizational culture and values; the fourth defini-

tion is the individual personality and perceived organizational image.

Almost all of the mentioned above scholars concluded that POF affects employees' behavior, like organizational commitment, job satisfaction, intention to leave and so on. As Chatman (1989) put it, the fit between people's values and organization values can predict individual satisfaction, commitment, turnover and performance. She added that employees that share organization's values are more likely to contribute to the organization in more constructive ways. Similarly, O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell (1991)

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proposed that when the fit between the personal values and organizational values is high, employees are less likely to turnover, and are more satisfied, committed and productive. Chatman (1989) concluded that personal and organizational values influence each other and determined that the notion of POF enables us to evaluate the extent to which individual's values will change as a result of him/her being a member of an organization and also the extent to which the individual will adapt the organizational norms and values. Similarly, Cable & DeRue (2002) determined that employees who share the organization's values will be more likely to help the larger causes of the organization.

Kristof (1996) related also to the organizational and the personal sides of values and norms; she proposed that the organizational characteristics include culture, climate, values, goals and norms while the personal side includes values, goals, personality and attitudes. Where there is a similarity between the two sides' characteristics, supplementary fit exists. She added that there is a difference between direct and indirect measures of POF; in the direct measurements individuals are requested to rate how their values are compatible with those of the organization. Those individuals who consider that their values strongly fit with the organization's values reported also stronger organizational commitment than those who reported weak fit. Direct measures are more effective when one focuses on subjective or perceived fit, which is based

on the individual's judgment of how he/she rates the congruent strength between his/her and the organizational values. Therefore, a strong fit exists as long as it is perceived to exist, regardless of the question whether there is a similarity between the organizational and the individual's values. On the other hand, objective or indirect fit (called also “actual fit”) relates to the compatibility of individuals with verifiable organizational characteristics where it is necessary to measure the two levels in parallel. It was proposed by her that perceived fit should have more impact on individual attitudes like satisfaction and commitment, while actual (objective/indirect) fit influences mainly “process” outcomes like communication and teamwork, even if perceived fit does not exist.

Cable & DeRue (2002) and Judge & Cable (1997) proposed direct measures for evaluating POF, based on the common definition of POF as values congruence. In the first article perceived POF was measured through three items: “The things that I value in life are similar to the things that my organization values”, “My personal values match my organization's values and culture”, and “My organization's values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life”. Another direct (subjective) measure has been proposed by Judge & Cable (1997); respondents had to relate to three questions as follows: “To what degree do your values, goals and personality ‘match’ or fit this organization and the current employees in this organization?”, “To what degree do your values and personality prevent you from ‘fitting-in’ this organization because they are different from most of the other employees' values and personality in this organization?”, “Do you think the values and ‘personality’ of this organization reflect your own values and personality?”.

Another instrument for measuring POF, but an indirect (objective) one, had been developed by O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell (1991) and they called it The Organizational Culture Profile (OCP). By containing a set of value statements this instruments measure both the extent to which certain values characterize an organization and individuals' preferences for the same organizational values. The OCP is calculated on the basis of the correlation between the profile of organizational values and the profile of the individuals' preferences.

Barrett (2002) noted there was a strong link between values alignment and organizational effectiveness, and between values alignment and financial success. He mentioned Kotter & Heskett (1992) who showed that companies with strong adaptive cultures based on shared values outperformed other companies by a significant margins and showed higher rates of expansion, higher job creation rates and higher increase in stock prices. Barrett (2002) presented a model around what he called "Cultural Capital" which was defined as the "value attached to the collective mental programming (values, beliefs and behaviors) of the organization that supports its relationships with its employees, customers and society". In order to measure cultural capital he developed an instrument – Corporate Transformation Tools – which maps the individual and organizational values in order to measure the degree of alignment of personal values, current culture values and desired culture values. Each employee is asked the following three questions: one – which of the following values and behaviors best represents who you are, not what you desire to become (personal values), two – which of the following values and behaviors best represent how your organization operates (current culture values), three – which of the following values and behaviors best represents for you an ideal, high performance organization (desired culture values).

This model was based on Barrett (2001) where he argued that the beliefs that influence the behavior of successful individuals are the same beliefs and behaviors that drive successful organizations. He claimed, like Kristof (1996), that there is no real difference between the way individuals and organizations, which are actually groups of individuals, act and behave; while individuals are reflected by their personalities, organizations express themselves by their culture and what distinguish between personalities or between cultures are beliefs, behaviors and values that personalities or culture adapt. Moreover, later Barrett (2002) argued that decisions made by individuals and organizations are reflections of their personal or organizational values, so when the values of the individuals are the same as the values of the organizations then there is a values alignment. In this respect, he added that organizations that seek

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to align their values with the values of their employees are more successful and more focused on the needs of their employees and their customers, and are more fun to work in.

But, in contrary to the ideas above Mullins (2002) puts it that organizations with a strong corporate culture i.e. when there is a high employees' identification with and a high commitment to the organizational culture and values, tend to be inflexible. The employees in such organization do not perceive the need to change.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The research hypotheses were as follows:

Hypothesis 1. There is a positive correlation between POF of the employees and their EBP level. The higher the POF, the higher the EBP level.

Hypothesis 2. There is a positive correlation between EBP level and CBP level. The higher the EBP level, the higher the CBP level.

Hypothesis 3. There is a positive correlation between POF of the employees and CBP level. The higher the POF, the higher the CBP level.

Hypothesis 4. Age, gender, status and tenure, all influence the correlation between POF of the employees and their EBP level.

THE SAMPLE

The selected brand was that of "Kfar Hasha'ashuim" („The amusement village") which is a franchise-based chain in the field of toys and children

games. This is the largest franchise-based retailing chain in Israel and one of the two leading companies in the toys and games field; the other one is Toys-R-Us. "Kfar Hasha'ashuim" contains sixty-four stores and is spread over the entire country.

The sample populations were: (1) Franchisees and their employees – about 170 franchisees and their employees who operate 64 stores (2-3 workers

in each store). As was mentioned above the franchisees and their employees are altogether called, throughout this research, "employees". (2) Customers – customers who use to buy in "Kfar Hasha'ashuim" stores. 101 employees and 121 customers from 43 stores participated in the research. The number of participants among the employees reached about 60% of total population.

THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Two closed scale questionnaires were used during research, as follows:

1. A questionnaire for the employees only, developed after Cable & DeRue (2002) which examines their subjective perceived congruence between their own values and the corporate values (Person-Organization Fit or POF). The respondent had to note whether he/she agreed and to what extent to three statements, on the basis of an ordinal Likert-style rating scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). (See appendix 1.) The reliability of the scale in their research according to Cronbach's Alpha was .91 in a single-firm sample and .92 in a multiple-firm sample. The reliability was checked also by the researcher and it was found to be .878.
2. A structured questionnaire for the employees as well as for customers to examining their perception level of the corporate brand values. The preferred corporate values by the management were determined by the owner and managing director of the company, Mr. Avi Katz, as the brand values which Mr. Katz wished to be perceived as such by the customers (see appendix 4). This questionnaire presented respondents eight corporate values which were chosen by Mr. Katz out of fifty-four corporate values suggested by O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell (2001). This fifty-four corporate values list was called Organizational Culture Profile, and was aimed to serve as a means to measure POF in an objective way. This was chosen as a basis for determining corporate values because it seemed to be wide and comprehensive in a large scale, giving the respondent, Mr. Katz in this matter, enough possibilities to choose the values he would like see in his organization and be perceived as such by the customers.

The respondents had been asked to rank their perception level of the corporate values on a basis of

ordinal Likert-style rating scale between 1 and 7, where 1 means strongly disagreement of a corporate value as suit the organization as the respondent perceives it and 7 – strongly agreement of a corporate value as suit the organization according to the respondent's perception. (See appendices 2 and 3.) The Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the EBP/CBP questionnaire is .88. The reliability of the fifty-four items included in the OCP measure mentioned above was .88.

DATA PROCESSING

Correlation is the same as relationship; correlational statistics means the examining of the relationship or the correlation between variables (Herman 2001). In this research the following procedures were used:

- Chi square procedure – for testing whether the frequencies in the sample represent the predicted frequencies in the population; used in nominal data.
- T test for dependent variables – for significance testing when the research design involved matched groups or repeated measures and there are only two conditions of the independent variables.
- ANOVA (analysis of variance) – for determining whether significant differences exist in an experiment that involves two or more sample means.
- Fischer's Z test – for measuring differences between correlations.
- Pearson Correlation Coefficient – computed from the pairs of X scores and Y scores in a set of data that summarizes and describes the type of relationship present and the strength of that relationship. Pearson correlation coefficient was preferred over Spearman's because the measurement scale is in a range of 1 to 7 (over 4 scores).

THE RESEARCH RESULTS

Here are the results as for the research hypotheses, based on Pearson Correlation Coefficient. In each hypothesis variation matrix is presented showing the co-variance of the two variables.

Hypothesis 1. The hypothesis was examined by Pearson Correlation Coefficient and related to each employee separately (n=101). There was a significant positive correlation between POF and EBP($r(101) = 0.511$; $p < 0.01$); the higher the POF the

higher is the EBP. According to the results, hypothesis 1 has been supported.

Hypothesis 2. There is a positive correlation between EBP level and CBP level. The higher the EBP level, the higher the CBP level. This hypothesis was examined by Pearson Correlation Coefficient between the employees' and the customers' ratings of their brand perception. There was a significant positive correlation between EBP and CBP ($r_{43}=0.486$; $p<0.01$): the higher the EBP, the higher the CBP. According to the results, hypothesis 2 has been supported.

Hypothesis 3. There is a positive correlation between POF of the employees and CBP level. The higher the POF, the higher the CBP level. This hypothesis was examined by Pearson Correlation Coefficient between the POF of the employees and CBP. There was a non-significant positive correlation between POF and CBP ($r_{43}=0.207$; $p>0.05$). According to the results, hypothesis 3 has not been supported, although the results were in the hypothesized direction.

Hypothesis 4. This hypothesis was examined by Pearson Correlation Coefficient between POF and EBP within sub groups according to the employees' characteristics. The correlation between POF and EBP within the groups was positive but quite similar. According to Fischer's Z test the gap between the groups, in each one of the characteristics was not significant.

OTHER RESULTS

T and ANOVA tests were made to examining the relations between the employees' and customers' characteristics, on the one hand, and POF, EBP and CBP on the other.

Employees

According to these tests there were no correlations found between the employees' and customers' characteristics and the research variables, except for the correlation between the employee's age and POF and EBP. A significant correlation was found between age and POF ($F_{2,92}=4.311$; $p<0.005$): within employees at the age of 41 and above the POF is lower (5.47) than within younger employees (5.95 and 5.93). A significant correlation was also found between age and EBP ($F_{2,92}=3.089$; $p=0.05$); within employees at the age of 41 and above the rating was

lower (5.54) than within younger employees (6.05 and 6.04). Therefore, whenever the employee is older, his/her both POF and EBP levels are lower than those of younger employees.

Customers

No correlations were found among customers regarding the research variables.

DISCUSSION

The research hypotheses

The following discussion relates to the research hypotheses and the results presented above.

Hypothesis 1. Jamal & Goode (2001) examined the impact of self-image congruence on brand preference and satisfaction, stating that the perceptions of self are connected to the personality so that individuals tend to buy brands whose personalities are close to individual's own self-images. That is to say individuals express themselves by preferring brands whose personalities are perceived to be fit with their own personalities. Their main conclusion is that there is a strong relationship between self-image congruency and brand preference. Their findings also confirm that customers might prefer brands that have images compatible with their perceptions of self. Hussey & Duncombe (1999) concluded that the congruence between brand image and self-concept increases in parallel to an increase in consumers' preferences of brands. This concept can relate also to organization's employees who tend to be more identified with corporate brand values which fit their own values. As Harris & de Chernatony (2001) put it, "the greater the congruence between the employees' personal values and the corporate brand values, the better is the brand performance". According to Herman (2001) the organization employees seek for a fit between the corporate brand values and the corporate values themselves; if there is a misfit between the two, the employees look at this situation as a lie and therefore refuse to stand behind the corporate brand values. A high fit between the employee's values and the organizational values (POF) as he/she perceives it will bring to a high acceptance level of the organizational values by him/her. As a consequence, when the brand values reflect the corporate values the employees will respond to the brand values positively and agree that the corporate brand values

and the corporate values are actually the same. In such a case the brand perception level of the employees (EBP) will be close to the corporate brand values declared by the management. This hypothesis has been supported.

Hypothesis 2. As Herman (2001) pointed out, when the employees identify with the corporate brand, the brand values are fully and consistently realized, a result which contributes to the belief the consumer feels towards the brand. He also added that organizations like Harley-Davidson, Body Shop and Disney are good examples for such consumer belief. In these organizations the brand perception of the customers fits the brand promise and values determined by the management because of the support coming from the organization's employees. In other words, in such cases the employees believe in the brand and are ready to support it as "brand ambassadors". Aaker (2002) presented the examples of Saturn and Body shop by stating that their employees are regarded as being committed to their organizations' values and culture. Most customers, therefore, sense these values and have developed high identification level with them. As Davis (2000) put it, if the organization wishes to enhance the power of its brand it is important that the customer's perception of the organization brand will be formed by the employee's action and behavior. Aaker (2002) also stated that brand identity must be based partially on the organization behind the brand. This hypothesis has been supported.

Hypothesis 3. Cable & Judge (1996), Chan (1996), and Kristof (1996) all determined that high POF has a positive impact on employees' satisfaction which leads to a greater commitment to the organization and its goals. Chatman (1989) as well as Cable & deRue (2002) added that employees who share the organization values are more likely to help its larger causes and show "extra behavior", and O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell (1991) determined that when the fit between the personal values and organizational values is high, employees are less likely to turnover, and are more satisfied, committed and productive. This was the rationale behind this hypothesis. Whereas the result was in the hypothesized direction, although not supported statistically, it seems that POF needs the EBP as an "assistant" to explain customers' perception of the brand.

Hypothesis 4. The results show that these factors do not serve as moderate variables which influence

the correlation between POF and EBP. Whereas Rokeach (1973) and others defined values as beliefs, attitudes, judgments and behaviors and whereas Massey (1979) determined that specific factors such as family, friends, religion, education, the media, geographic roots, technology, current events etc influence personal values, it seems that demographic background or other "objective" terms, like status or tenure, are not variables to deal with when values are at stake.

Other results

The relations between the employees' and customers' characteristics, on the one hand, and the research variables on the other, were examined too. It was found that only employees' age influence POF and EBP levels, and in such a way that whenever the employee is older, his/her both POF and EBP levels are lower than those of younger employees. The most interesting phenomenon is that both POF and EBP are lower according to older employees' perception. It seems again, therefore, like it was hypothesized and supported in Hypothesis 1 that POF and EBP are inter correlated positively.

CONCLUSIONS

Relationships between the extent to which employees perceive their values as congruent with their organization's values on the one hand, and the way they and their customers perceive the corporate brand values, on the other, were explored in this study. The notion of "inside/outside branding" was the basic rationale for the study, whereas it focuses on the problem emerging from a gap which might exist between the brand values and promise, and the "real happening" (the organizational culture and values), a problem that many organizations usually face.

It is shown in the literature that employees have an important role in the way customers perceive the corporate brand. In order to get the employees' cooperation regarding the transference of the brand values to the customers, the management has to build a corporate culture and values which support the brand values; only then the management will get its employees' support of the brand values.

A high degree of a congruence between the individual values of the employees and the organizational values may create culture and values which

the employees will feel comfortable with, and when the brand values which the management wishes to transfer to the customers reflect the organizational culture and values, the employees will perceive these values as congruent with the organization's values and will be more ready to transfer them to the customers. This readiness of the employees is being promoted by a high POF, whereas high POF means a higher commitment and willingness to do extra work for the organization. As a result the customers will perceive the brand values in a similar way the employees perceive it; as a consequence the brand positioning will be strengthened.

An Israeli retail chain involved in toys and children games market was chosen to analyse, a chain which has been a relatively new player in the market but reached about 25% market share within a period of less than ten years. Forty-three stores participated in the research and each store was represented by 2-3 employees and 2-3 customers. The ability to connect certain employees with specific customers enables the researcher to use Pearson Correlation Coefficient to measure the relationship between the brand perception of the employees and that of the customers.

According to our view the impact of Person-Organization Fit (POF) on the brand perception of employees and of customers had never been examined before. Moreover, POF has been examined as a factor influencing internal factors such as commitment; identification, intention to leave the organization and readiness to do extra work, but not external factor such as brand perception; this is what makes this study unique.

According to the research outcomes, two of the four research hypotheses, #1 and #2 were supported while the outcomes regarding hypothesis 3 were according to its direction, although it was not supported statistically. Hypothesis 4 which related to moderate variables was not supported.

These outcomes show that Person-Organization Fit affects the brand perception of the employees in a positive direction and that the brand perception of customers is correlated positively with the brand perception of employees. Therefore it seems that POF

has a positive impact on customers' brand perception but one has to use brand perception of employees as an interfering variable. Hypothesis 3 which examined the direct impact of POF on brand perception of customers was not supported, although the hypothesis's direction has been followed, as mentioned above.

An interesting outcome is that employee's age has a significant correlation with POF and EBP. In

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both, older employees (more than forty-one years old) had lower POF and EBP than younger ones. This outcome may point out that older employees feel less comfortable with the organization culture and values as well as with its brand values. Another conclusion might be that whereas older employees have a low POF in relation to younger employees they have also a low EBP. This result fits the positive correlation which was found between POF and EBP (hypothesis 1).

This study proved once again that internal branding has a major role in building a powerful and successful corporate brand.

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