Creating Recognition for Employee Recognition:
A Case Study on Public Relations, Branding, and Marketing

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The integration of public relations, marketing and branding presents critical issues to strategic communication. Whereas organizations seek integration for communication efficiency and effectiveness, scholars argue that to imbue public relations with marketing persuasion would damage the credibility of public relations. This case study explores public relations within a marketing context at the global employee recognition firm, O.C. Tanner. This study reveals an under-examined role of public relations within marketing communication—public relations to create the corporate brand—and demonstrates how public relations, as education, can be integrated into marketing communication without damaging the credibility of public relations. The article concludes that public relations research should focus on the development of public relations as strategic communication, and finds that one potential area for this development is understanding public relations' role in brand management.

Introduction

The use of persuasion as a viable strategy in public relations has been a questionable one, as public relations practitioners continuously seek new ways to "engineer consent"—as Bernays (1923) termed it—for public approval of organizational decisions. This has led many practitioners to employ "ballyhoo and publicity stunts" (Jackall & Hirota, 2000, p. 12) to win over public opinion. Reduced to the lowest common denominator, public relations is often considered a race to win over the public's favor, filling news pages, T.V. newscasts, and Internet blogs with the latest organizational heroics and good deeds, even if that means withholding incriminating information. In short, persuasion makes public relations out to be a "simple mouthpiece for corporate interests" (Edwards, 2006, p. 230) and limited "self-serving propaganda business" (Hiebert, 2003, p. 369) that fails to build necessary lasting relationships with publics. Scholars today emphasize negotiation and accommodation over pushing organizational interest and crafting messages that persuade the public to do what companies want them to do because this reportedly creates better organization-public relationships (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995).

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However, from a professional perspective, public relations strategy should not be considered a black and white decision between persuading public opinion and accommodating public needs—persuasion is a given, and organizations should use it to build lasting relationships with their publics by creating a unique and recognizable persona for the organization. This identity is otherwise known as the corporate brand, or the way publics perceive an organization based on the way an organization presents itself. As Grunig and Hung (2002) and Schultz and Kitchen (2001) argue, the key to creating this brand is forging relationships with publics. The brand is traditionally thought of as a marketing concept, as most of the literature on branding is found in the marketing domain, rather than in public relations scholarship. Businesses today, however, are discovering that success hinges on synthesizing public relations and marketing functions into one communications strategy to create a unified voice that positively influences the public experience with the organization. Similarly, public relations scholarship is exploring the integration of public relations and marketing efforts into one communications strategy.

Whereas public relations plays a integral part in creating and managing the corporate brand, its role is under-analyzed and rarely developed in academic literature. The purpose of this case study is to fill that gap and explore the use of persuasion in public relations strategy by analyzing public relations' role in creating the corporate brand.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How is persuasion defined in strategic public relations?

This question was chosen to explore the current use of persuasion in public relations strategy, and to understand if an organization sees the use of persuasion in the same way that public relations scholarship does. This question was also meant to uncover current strategies in public relations, and to explore the link between public relations and branding in an open-ended way.

Research Question 2: How do practitioners use persuasion in public relations strategy to create the corporate brand?

A follow-up area for exploration in relation to the previous question, this question was chosen to explore the role of public relations strategy in corporate brand, and to understand the integration of marketing and public relations at the organizational level.

Research Question 3: How does an organization use persuasion to build strong ties with publics?

This question was chosen to explore how public relations efforts affect an organization's ability to create strong relationships. As Grunig and Hung (2002) argued,

relationships affect an organization's reputation (otherwise defined, by Grunig and Hung, as the corporate brand), and this question would help me explore how synchronizing public relations and marketing efforts might affect that relationship and reputation. I felt this was especially pertinent considering that a marketing-oriented initiative like brand management might damage the integrity of public relations efforts and impair organization-public relationships.

Case Organization

Headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, O.C. Tanner is a global business-to-business employee recognition company that helps organizations better engage their employees. With an 80 year history in producing awards and recognition products, O.C. Tanner maintains that recognition, more than promotions and salary increases, engenders employee loyalty and stimulates better employee performance.

O.C. Tanner seems to be an ideal case to explore persuasion and the corporate brand. Rather than filling the press with announcements of notable company achievements, O.C. Tanner focuses on educating the public on the value of employee recognition. Most communication activities outline the principles of employee recognition and explain how to use them.

Review of the Literature

Many scholars have explored the value of persuasion and its varying applications.

In Grunig's (2001) symmetrical worldview, strategic public relations requires a balance between persuasion and accommodation to create long-lasting relationships with publics:

"Communicators keep their eyes on a broader professional perspective of balancing private and public interests…They must listen as well as argue. This does not mean, however that they do not argue or attempt to persuade. Rather, they must consistently remind themselves and management that they might not be right and, indeed, that their organization might be better of if they listen to others" (p. 28)

Other scholars propose a stronger emphasis on persuasion in public relations. As Stacks and Watson (2007) argue, "most two-way public relations models follow 'asymmetrical' rather than 'symmetrical' models" (p. 67).

Miller (1989) argued that public relations and persuasion are "two Ps in a pod" (p. 45), calling for the continuous development of effective persuasive methods in public relations (Miller, 2002; Miller 1989). According to Miller, persuasion was "an indispensable and irrevocable dimension of human existence" (1989, p. 47) that

allowed man to control his environment. Other scholars have followed suit, calling persuasion an "essential function of contemporary public relations" (Pfau & Wan, 2006, p. 102) and recognizing its role and value in influencing attitudes and behavior (Edgett, 2002; McCoy & Hargie, 2003; Gattonel, 2002; Henard, 2002). As Paisley (2001) explained, persuasion in public relations should go without saying: "It is assumed that [public communication] planners…intend to influence the beliefs and behavior of others" (p. 6). Overall, the general notion for scholars who support the use of persuasion in public relations is that persuasion is a natural part of the practice, and that effective public communication campaigns, "inform, persuade, and mobilize" (McCoy & Hargie, 2003, p. 306)

Uses of Persuasion

Scholars who validate the use of persuasion, position it as dialogue between the organization and its public, in which each party advocates its own interests. Some scholars (Heath, 2007; Holtzhausen, 2007; Plowman, 2007; Spicer, 2007; Miller, 2006), suggest a reconsideration of the concept of persuasion, itself, recasting it as advocacy. Holtzhausen asserts that "advocacy, rather than two-way symmetrical communication, [may be] the main purpose of public relations" (Holtzhausen, 2007, p. 363), and Heath (2007) describes the relationship between organizations and publics as an advocacy/counter-advocacy experience that engenders co-created meaning.

Heath (2007) argues that through advocacy, organizations act as "good citizens" (p. 42), introducing vital ideas into the marketplace of communication. In Heath's perspective, organizations advocate for their own interests, and in so doing, co-create meaning and discover "better ideas, justice, higher morals, wise policies, and sound identifications" (p. 57). As Heath explains, by persuasively arguing for one position or the other, people become both "advocates and listeners with the propositions afloat in those communities" (p. 42). In this sense, advocacy requires "reflective… listening and learning" (p. 63) allowing organizations and publics to come to agreement. This dialogue creates a relationship of advocacy and counter-advocacy.

Issues management is one area where persuasive dialogue is particularly applicable. As Heath (2006) argues, "Critics advocate change," (p. 67) and organizations can defend their actions or engage critics to make a collaborative decision and come to a consensus. Through the persuasive dialogue that ensues, "both sides have views they express and preferences they advocate" and the relationship becomes one of "statement and counter statement, voiced expressions of what organizations do and what they should do" (p. 67). Whether the organization moves closer to accommodating stakeholders or convinces stakeholders to bend to the organization's objectives, the goal of this dialogue, Heath claims, is harmony. In this way, persuasion is effective for creating dialogue between the organization and its public.

In the literature, the focus of the use of persuasion is on its effect on publics. As Hamilton (1989) argued, "the bottom line of any public relations campaign is the extent

to which the project affects the behavior of the target public" (p. 323). Scholars acknowledge the need to identify diverse publics (Aldoory & Sha, 2007), understand their needs and motivations (Todorov, Chaiken, & Henderson, 2002; Lundy, 2006; Wood, 2000), classify organizational relationships with publics (Falconi, 2006; Stacks & Watson, 2007; Spicer, 2007), and even create a more transparent organization (Badarracco, 1998).

Other scholars (McGuire, 2001; Baker & Martinson, 2001, 2002; Pratt, 2004) outline specific step-by-step approaches to effective persuasion, including employing principles like reciprocity, consistency, social validation, friendship, authority, and scarcity (Rhoads & Cialdini, 2001). Several scholars outline ethical guidelines for persuasion in public relations, including, among others: maintaining explicit understanding and awareness to the publics' perspectives (Baker & Martinson, 2002; Edgett, 2002, Cooper & Kelleher, 2001) to avoid "undue influence on…the target public" (Edgett, p. 13), "cooperation toward the achievement of a common goal" (Rhoads & Cialdini, 2002, p. 534), maintaining truth and trustworthiness in advocating the organization's cause (Bradley, 2004; Baker & Martinson, 2002; Edgett, 2002), considering the publics' vulnerability toward the organization (Spicer, 2007; Baker & Martinson, 2002), demonstrating "good sense, higher moral character, and good will" (Bradley, 2004, p. 8), maintaining organizational transparency (Bradley, 2004; Edgett, 2002, Badaracco, 1998), and considering the broader ramifications or social contexts of the organization's advocacy efforts (Baker & Martinson, 2002, 2001).

Persuasion and Brand Recognition
One applicable area where persuasion is used in communication campaigns is in the creation of an organization's brand, image, and identity—or, in the way an organization portrays itself to the public. These ideas have been underdeveloped in the literature, and even the definitions of brand, image, and identity vary.

Schultz and Kitchen (2001) define brand as "the central core or hub of what consumers want, need, and consider to be of value" (p. 90) and they explain that the corporation is "a brand in its own right" (p. 85). According to Schultz and Kitchen, corporate communication should be dedicated to creating and sustaining that brand in the same way it would manage its own products because "it is the brand with which customers and consumers have ongoing relationships" (p. 90). The brand may be created by the organization, but the public defines it. As such, the brand is constantly changing based on public sentiment. "Consumers are increasingly wanting to know more about the company behind the well-known brands" and so the corporation "stands for an entity, often deliberately planned by corporate communication specialists, and an image possessed by those publics impacted by the corporation" (p. 92). The communication strategy, then, should focus on promoting the brand; and through integrated communication, the organization keeps track of "how the company *as a brand* is doing" (p. 95).

The ideas of corporate image and identity are not clearly distinguished from each other in the literature. Schultz and Kitchen (2001) explain that corporate image is the way people see the brand and is a reflection of the identity of an organization, which is a result of the way an organization communicates its corporate brand. Grunig and Hung (2002) argue that these overlapping terms describe the same thing: "what publics think of an organization". The exception is identity, which Grunig and Hung argue is the way an organization sees itself. For brand, image, and other overlapping terms, Grunig and Hung use the term *reputation*, and argue that relationships affect an organization's reputation (as Schultz and Kitchen also claimed). Furthermore, Grunig and Hung state that reputation separates public relations from marketing. However, these definitions relate more to organizations with "multiple product lines and diverse brands" (Schultz & Kitchen, p. 85) and Shultz and Kitchen admit that for business to business firms the understanding of a corporate brand requires more exploration. For the purposes of this study, I define brand as the way the organization portrays itself to its public (including its messages and behaviors) and, consider a brand validated by the public's interaction with the company.

One issue of analyzing the role of public relations in creating corporate brand has been the concern of sublimation to marketing. Integrated marketing communication proponents have pushed the idea of integrated communication, which prescribes that public relations and marketing be housed under one heading to provide a unified communication message to the public, or, as Hallahan (2007) explains, an organization "communicates purposefully at all levels of contact" developing a "single *persona* and voice" (p. 309-310). The danger in combining both functions is that marketing objectives will skew public relations activities towards a focus on advertising and selling, cheapening public relations efforts and damaging the potential to build ties with stakeholders and other publics.

As outlined above, the perspectives of brand, identity, image, and reputation are underdeveloped in the public relations academic literature. By exploring the persuasive strategy of creating brand recognition and establishing the organization as a thought leader in the industry, I have sought to add further insight on these perspectives and make further the meaning of persuasion in public relations. This study seeks to explain the use of public relations in creating and managing an organization's brand, and outline public relation's role in integrated communication—adding needed practical and theoretical perspectives to academic literature.

Case Study Method

To understand O.C. Tanner's use of persuasion in public relations, I conducted an in-depth case study of the organization. The case study method provided me with multiple perspectives of O.C. Tanner's communication practices and allowed me to be descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory at the same time—all of which are strengths of the case study method according to Yin (2003). The case study method also helps answer empirical questions like "how" and "why," and helps build an understanding of

theory such as persuasion and brand management in public relations by seeking illustration that matches the theory.

The case study method has disadvantages, two of which are relevant to this project: Cases do not permit generalization and they can lead to interviewer bias as the researcher may become too enthralled with the company in question. I sought to overcome these disadvantages by exploring the practices I studied against the principles contained in the literature, rather than using the information I gathered to make a case for O.C. Tanner's own communication model. The results and conclusions in this case study represent one perspective of the principles in the literature, and other cases may contrary findings regarding persuasion and public relations' role in brand management.

Data Collection and Analysis
There were three main sources of information: interviews, documentation, and archival records. For my primary data source, I conducted interviews with chief executives, senior leaders, and managers at O.C. Tanner. After securing University Institutional Review Board approval, I conducted telephone interviews with Kent Murdock, Chief Executive Officer; Robert Mukai, Director of Marketing; Adrian Gostick, Managing Director of Communications; and Amy Skylling, Manager of Marketing and Communication. I recorded and transcribed each interview and then analyzed the interviews for themes related to my research questions. Each participant signed and returned a consent form, releasing the interview data collected and permitting their names to be used in this report.

The second source of data included such documentation as press releases, white papers, case studies, books and other publications produced by O.C. Tanner. I also collected news articles from 2001 through 2006 from online databases and analyzed the video recording of O.C. Tanner's 2006 Executive Recognition Summit held in San Francisco as well as market research conducted for O.C. Tanner by Wirthlin Worldwide. I also reviewed internal company memos, videos, statements, and newsletters.

To analyze the data, I identified the main themes in the interviews, and tracked these themes through the materials collected. I then analyzed the themes and data against to the conceptual framework available in the literature to develop more fully the concept of brand management as a public relations function, and the use of persuasion in that regard.

Results

Research Question 1: How is persuasion defined in strategic public relations?

O.C. Tanner defines persuasion in its public relations strategy as education. Persuasion is a way to teach and instruct publics on the benefits of employee engagement through recognition.

O.C. Tanner makes meaning of persuasion in this way because of what it considers to be a need to recognize the benefits of employee recognition, a need tracked through O.C. Tanner proprietary research. O.C. Tanner identified that even though 96 percent of employed Americans surveyed indicated that employee morale is important in the success of a company (47% stated it is extremely important), over half of those surveyed (57%) said their company was not taking any steps to keep people focused on corporate goals and improve morale. Furthermore, 79 percent of employees leave their jobs because of a lack of recognition (Gostick & Elton, 2006, p. 24). In a Gallup survey posted, among 12 dimensions discovered in a survey of 80,000 employees, employee recognition ranked fourth.

This and other research cited on O.C. Tanner's website gives clarification to the company's perspective of persuasion. It is a way to build recognition for the recognition industry. Rob Mukai, Director of Marketing at O.C. Tanner calls this use of persuasion "category development," or building the need for the industry category. This need was best articulated up by company CEO Kent Murdock: "I know people who've achieved every incentive at a company, and they've had their resume out on the market the whole time."

Defining persuasion as public education on employee recognition represents the O.C. Tanner worldview according to CEO Kent Murdock: "[Our purpose] is to literally condition corporate America to our view of recognition…that productivity comes form engaged employees." O.C. Tanner's "grander purpose" as Murdock calls it, is to teach managers to trust and develop their people better and recognize employees for the successes they bring to the company. "This is the way we look at the world. The higher purpose than the money is to help build strong cultures in the companies we serve."

For O.C. Tanner, persuasion in public relations efforts transcends building favorable opinion towards the organization. As Skylling explained, the company's communication is "more educational…building the case explaining why recognition is important…It's not heavily focused on O.C. Tanner per se." Mukai added that O.C. Tanner sells the idea of performance through employee recognition from a 3rd party perspective. In other words, it is more about education than recognition for the company, itself.

As such, O.C. Tanner's press materials emphasize the statistics that support its worldview. Some of its research sends the message that "employees leave their

managers, not their companies," as Amy Skylling, O.C. Tanner Marketing and Communications Manager explains. Employee recognition solves that problem, while other press material specifically demonstrates that "the link between employee recognition and financial performance [is more than just] anecdotal," as stated in their white paper entitled *Recognition Pays.* The aforementioned white paper features research results from a study of 26,000 employees of varying levels at 31 organizations that shows that "companies that effectively recognize excellence enjoy a return that is *more than triple the return* of companies that don't."

This does not mean, however, that O.C. Tanner teaches the value of employee recognition anonymously. As Murdock explained, "If we were to condition the market, and our competitors grew as a result of it, we would consider ourselves failures." Therefore, another way O.C. Tanner defines persuasion is to "get [its] message out there," as Director of Communications Adrian Gostick put it. That message is two-fold: 1) employee engagement through recognition improves company performance and 2) O.C. Tanner is the only company that can deliver programs that meet the employee engagement challenge. In this way, O.C. Tanner's communications goals are to establish the company as the thought leader in the industry. And the organization accomplishes this through its communication material, which they term, "Intellectual Asset Development."

O.C. Tanner's intellectual assets are the resources and material the company develops to educate its publics. Primary among these resources are the books written by Gostick and company trainer Chester Elton, including *The 24 Carrot Manager* and *The Invisible Employee,* which focus on what Gostick termed "the carrot message" or the simple ways to reinforce employees for good performance. As the authors explain, carrots are "effective rewards and recognition…[that] your employees are craving" and feed "that hunger for recognition that drives them to leave for other jobs" (Gostick & Elton, 2002, p.8). Other intellectual assets include white papers, case studies, trade press articles, and research material the company distributes throughout the media, at industry conferences, and directly to Human Resource and C-level executives (its target publics).

The company's intellectual assets reveal the goal of O.C. Tanner's communication efforts, per its own definition of persuasion: to establish the company as a trusted resource in the industry. Company CEO Murdock originally tasked Gostick with "making some noise" and getting "O.C. Tanner in front of people's minds." The result, according to Gostick, has been 300 to 400 press mentions a year, and recognition as a resource and thought leader in employee engagement. As Murdock explained, the intellectual assets helped the company "articulate what we've all been struggling to articulate to our clients." And in that articulation, said Murdock, the intellectual assets assist O.C. Tanner in "gaining an ear" and creating "instant credibility and notoriety."

Research Question 2: How do practitioners use persuasion in public relations strategy to create the corporate brand?

O.C. Tanner uses persuasion to establish the company as the industry resource and thought leader. This status represents the image the company wants to portray to the industry and its publics—an image that is better defined as its corporate brand.

"A brand is a promise to your customers," says Mukai, and it permeates the interaction a company has with its public. The promise that O.C. Tanner makes to its publics is "We will teach you to engage your employees through recognition." This, according to company executives and managers interviewed, includes "helping organizations engage their people," "not just selling you programs, [but rather] training your managers," "doing great service," "build[ing] strong cultures," and "[helping] people design and implement and instill practices and programs in their company that begin to recognize employees for their accomplishments."

O.C. Tanner creates its brand by first educating its publics on the merits of employee engagement (its defined use of persuasion) and then by integrating those merits into principles that represent the company's value proposition to its public. According to Murdock, the strategy is less about "what tactics do you employ to get people to buy your stuff," and more about answering the questions, "Who are we? What is our value proposition? What do we stand for? What's different about us than our clients?" O.C. Tanner employs persuasion to create a distinct brand by which publics can identify the company.

O.C. Tanner uses its intellectual assets to differentiate itself and articulate its brand. Through best practice case studies, white papers, books, and training, O.C. Tanner sends the message that employee recognition is "a real business must-have" rather than a "nice to have" (as Skylling explained) and that O.C. Tanner has the competency to be the primary resource for employee recognition issues. As such, the company scours the media for ties to employee recognition, such as the *Fortune* magazine 100 best places to work. "We take the initiative as the industry leader to dig into that *Fortune* best places to work [and ask] 'Who are they? What are they doing that making a difference?' and then we draw conclusions and publish that information," explained Skylling.

O.C. Tanner uses its intellectual assets, like the *Fortune* magazine commentary, to portray the company as the primary resource for employee recognition, and keep the company "top of mind," as company leaders explained. And, in this way, communicators at O.C. Tanner use their intellectual assets to persuade publics to look to them for employee engagement issues. According to Mukai, the brand is articulated "in this whole idea of the recognition experience—that we can create more effective recognition for you."

To create its brand around the recognition experience, the company focuses its communication efforts on innovation and distributing the latest information on employee engagement. "We're a thought leader and an industry leader," explained Skylling, "so we're really developing the overall market…innovation is something that is very important to us." Gostick added, "We write a lot of copy, and things on our websites and brochures, and about a year later, it's everywhere. So we have to be coming up with new information and new copy because we're the leader in the industry."

This has led to the expansion of O.C. Tanner's company brand into two product brands—the *Carrot* brand and the *Thanks* brand. Each has its own unique website, but both reflect O.C. Tanner's corporate brand in that they support the company's position as the thought leader. As Mukai explained, the difference is fuzzy. "It's O.C. Tanner philosophy…it just happens to be branded *Carrots* for external communication." But the distinction between product brands and corporate brand is a challenge, especially considering that the company's most recognizable intellectual assets are 3rd party—they are not identified as O.C. Tanner material, specifically. According to Mukai, it has created some confusion.

> "One of the challenges we've got is…we started building some product brands around service awards because that's all we did at the time. And as we kept going we kept naming things and kept branding it, 'this that and the other thing' and we've got a bit of an alphabet soup in terms of what we do have. One of the jobs we've got going forward is…[getting] our hands around…three different brands and this alphabet soup within service awards. One of the jobs for next year is [making] sense of this to the marketplace, in the context of what we think the brand means now."

The interviewees explained that despite this challenge, the brands support the company's deeper purpose to differentiate itself. "Typically our content gets used by others, [though] slightly manipulated," Gostick explained. "Our goal is to differentiate ourselves, because a lot of times, we'll look the same, all of us look the same to a customer. And so, communication plays a key role in differentiating us from the competition."

Another way O.C. Tanner uses persuasion to articulate its brand is through its people. Company executives explained that O.C. Tanner uses its salespeople and corporate trainers to convey the message that employee engagement through recognition is crucial. The communication managers indicated that one of the primary functions of public relations, marketing, and communications at O.C. Tanner is to support the sales staff with material that speaks to need for employee recognition. Or, as Skylling said, "[the communication department] is responsible for everything that touches a customer." Salespeople maintain contact with O.C. Tanner's target publics, giving out public relations material (books, white papers, etc.) and setting up special websites to apprise the public of the need for employee recognition. Whereas the

immediate purpose here is to increase profit, these activities are not contingent on making a sale. Salespeople distribute the carrot principles to clients and non-clients alike. Through the communication department's support, sales people act as experts in the employee engagement.

O.C. Tanner's corporate trainers and speakers fulfill a similar role, speaking at industry conferences, client organizations, and other venues to communicate the need for employee recognition. Their messages focus entirely on the principles of employee recognition, rather than on O.C. Tanner itself, as they instruct audiences on recognition practices. As one company speaker explained, trainers may not connect their presentations to O.C. Tanner, but the audiences associate the speakers as representatives of the company. In this way, the company seeks to strengthen its brand by distributing engagement principles through its trainers.

Research Question 3: How does an organization use persuasion to build strong ties with publics?

Building strong ties with publics starts with the awareness created by the brand. Murdock explained, "We try to put O.C. Tanner on top of mind awareness when people are thinking about recognition in any way. When an executive says, 'We've got to get our people engaged' we want them to think of O.C. Tanner as a resource." In other words, O.C. Tanner uses persuasion to move publics from awareness of the organization to connection with the organization.

According to Skylling, this process starts with knowing the needs of the company's publics. "We try to stay very connected with our sales field so we have a sense of the things that are most needed out there." This includes looking at the industry trends and the issues that clients bring up. As Murdock explained, "The nature of the company is to read and assess the market and the needs of clients and prospects. It's a strategy driven organization trying to take as our principle voice, the voice that we hear in the market."

Skylling added that the O.C. Tanner communication department also works directly with the company's HR department to identify what its own employees need and how the company can incorporate industry best practices internally.

According to O.C. Tanner, building ties with publics starts with using the brand to create a positive reputation. As Mukai explains: "Reputation is a lot about how you deal with customers, regardless of what you're trying to portray yourself as. Brand is what you're trying to portray yourself as. Getting those two aligned is a pretty important thing." In this regard, the brand is created through an understanding of targeted publics and their perspective of O.C. Tanner as an organization.

O.C. Tanner segments its publics and crafts appropriate messages for each one. As Gostick explained, "The lower-level person wants ease and 'make things simple for

me,' the higher level person wants strategy and return on their investment." An analysis of the company's intellectual assets shows this differentiation. The books and articles are designed for lower-level people (i.e. managers and supervisors who will implement the principles with staff) with a focus on implementation of simple employee recognition principles. For example, an article in *Human Resources* magazine entitled "Incentives Drive Results" outlined the main steps to link incentives with recognition.

On the other hand, O.C. Tanner's engagement with higher-level people (i.e. C-level leaders and senior executives) emphasizes the benefits of employee engagement. These "touch points" with executives, Gostick and Mukai explained, include conferences, "lunch and learns," and O.C. Tanner's own employee engagement summits it holds annually. Presentations in these venues feature statistics and high profile case studies that demonstrate the return on investment for employee recognition programs. According to interviews, the differing levels target publics and communication activities create a challenge in honing brand messages appropriately. "With so many touch points," commented Mukai, "aligning all those touch points is really the challenge." The purpose is to give publics, no matter what their category, a similar experience with the brand.

One area where O.C. Tanner accomplishes this alignment is through their employee engagement summits, where business executives, human resource directors, and other professionals congregate to discuss employee engagement issues and practices. At the company's 2006 summit in San Francisco, executives and professionals from organizations like Avis, Friendly's Ice Cream, as well as top-recognized authors like Jim Kouzes discussed the importance of recognition, and their respective applications of employee engagement principles. One example found in the company's DVD reproduction of the event featured a testimonial from the Director of HR Friendly's Ice Cream, who explained that Friendly's tried giving its employees more money to increase engagement, but it did not work. "There's a reason we keep those old high school trophies" she explained, "it meant something to us. That's what we're creating recognition."

Through touch points like the engagement summit, O.C. Tanner creates a dialogue with its publics in which executives, leaders, and practitioners preach the benefits of employee recognition. In this way, O.C. Tanner seeks to go beyond public awareness and build ties with target publics. According to Murdock, the strength of this relationship can be measured by its publics' commitment to employee engagement: "In our last summit, we had our clients speaking about recognition, not us…You hear it straight from the horse's mouth. This is what this company is doing with our doctrine… It's an amazing display of the validity of this theory or intellectual asset that we've developed."

Overall, O.C. Tanner seeks to build relationships through its publics' own recognition of employee recognition principles. As Murdock explained, "We're trying to

expand beyond success in an industry to truly measure our success by the success of our clients, which we think will come from the engagement of their employees."

Conclusion

This case illustrates how persuasion is used in public relations to manage the brand. As Pfau and Wan (2006) argued, public relations research should focus on the development of public relations as strategic communication. This study makes the case that one potential area for this development is understanding public relations' role in brand management.

O.C. Tanner's use of persuasion to establish its brand illustrates some of the perspectives on public relations in the academic literature, particularly Heath's rhetorical perspective. O.C. Tanner introduces vital ideas to the marketplace, and then through listening and learning, creates a dialogue with its publics about employee engagement. In this dialogue, O.C. Tanner advocates the need for employee recognition, and with publics, co-creates meaning for that need respective to each organization. As O.C Tanner publics participate in company summits, they add to the dialogue on the benefits of employee engagement.

This case also shows what Grunig and Hung (2002) theorized, that the public's relationship with an organization affects the company's reputation. Through O.C. Tanner's communication activities, particularly its in-person events like "lunch and learns" and summits, the company seeks stronger ties with publics by establishing itself as the most trusted resource on employee engagement. In this regard, this case shows that long-term relationships can be built using persuasion in public relations. In O.C. Tanner's persuasion-based approach, the company builds relationships with its publics by educating leaders on the necessity of employee engagement. As these leaders see the benefits (and tangible returns) of O.C. Tanner's philosophy, they join a community of professionals who associate O.C. Tanner with successful employee engagement principles. O.C. Tanner then becomes a trusted partner and resource, rather than a product or service provider. This trust creates a bond between the O.C. Tanner and its public, and leads to an ongoing relationship.

In addition to understanding persuasion's role in creating relationships, this case also adds to the current perspectives on brand management in the public relations literature. In particular, this case illustrates why an organization should be considered a brand in and of itself, as Schultz and Kitchen (2001) proposed. In spite of the company's separate *Carrots* and *Thanks* product brands, interviews with O.C. Tanner executives showed that the public associated employee engagement principles with the company, rather than the products. In fact, the different product brands created confusion in at least one instance. This speaks to the need for synchronization of public relations and marketing activities. Marketing efforts might promote a particular brand, but if not clearly connected to what the company represents (which, in this case was employee engagement as articulated through the public relations and

communications function), then confusion ensues, and marketing efforts are rendered inefficient.

In this way, this case contributes to the understanding of Integrated Communication (IC). O.C. Tanner's communication strategy demonstrates how public relations and marketing work together to communicate the corporate brand, and convey a unified voice to the public. According to Amy Skylling the communication department provides the executive nucleus with market-research-backed message strategy, and public relations and marketing work together to convey that message. In this sense, everything revolves around the brand, as intellectual assets support sales and marketing, while products, in turn, support the intellectual assets—and both build the company's brand around thought leadership.

Also related to IC, an analysis of O.C. Tanner's communication efforts also demonstrates the need for purposeful communication at all company levels to create a unified persona or brand. Both the marketing and the public relations departments should coordinate efforts around the main company communication objective. While each respective department maintains its traditional focus (i.e. marketing sells and PR manages stakeholder relationships), the efforts are harmonized and "purposeful" as Hallahan (2007) proposed.

Finally, more research is needed to solidify the differences between brand and reputation. Further research should also outline public relations' particular role in brand management, and should explore the distinct but integrated roles of public relations and marketing in the professional application of IC.

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