Chris Chapleo **PhD by publication**

An exploration of the concept of branding in the higher education sector

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

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sector

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to demonstrate that the applicant's published work

has made significant and unique contribution to the literature that justifies the award

of a Doctor of Philosophy.

Subsequent sections consider the particular research areas, their corresponding

refereed papers and their specific contribution to knowledge in relation to existing

literature in the field. This is therefore a commentary linking the published papers and

articles together and is intended to be viewed in conjunction with the accompanying

list of publications.

Terms of reference

Although much of the document has (as befits its role) been written in the first person,

the terms 'the applicant' and 'the author' have occasionally been used to refer to the

applicant for the award of Doctor of Philosophy.

1.0 Profile of applicant

Section 3.2 outlines the personal narrative that led to my developing this particular research area. The purpose of this section is to summarise specific areas in which the author has made a contribution and his personal profile within the discipline at the time of writing (November 2010).

I come from a background in strategic application of communications and marketing and, in 1998, began to combine practical and academic work. Since the publication of the first paper on the specific area of higher education branding in 2003, a further eight related papers on HE branding have been published (or accepted and awaiting publication) in refereed journals, forming the basis of the contribution for the award of PhD. The research straddles the disciplines of Marketing, Education and to some extent Public Sector Management and the journals have reflected this, which makes traditional metrics such as ABS rankings difficult to apply (although at least one journal is 2 star ABS ranked). Publications have generally been international in context and have included key journals in their particular discipline (e.g. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, *International Journal of Non Profit and Voluntary Sector Management*).

All of these papers are single authored except for one in *Perspectives* for which my contribution was 50%.

As well as academic output I have worked closely with marketing practitioners in this area to inform practice. Specific examples of this include:

 Industry reports with Communications Management of St. Albans, Herts in 2003 and 2010.

Participation on the committee for branding a new Human Rights CETL centre at Roehampton University, 2004.

Working with the marketing director of the University of Portsmouth on brand analysis for the university, 2008-10.

Presentations at CASE conferences in Cardiff 2003, Edinburgh 2005 and Brighton 2008.

Presentation at HEIST conference, Central London, October 2003 and at HEERA conference, Warwick, December 2003.

Presentation at 'Discovering Futures', London, 23 April 2009.

I have also published articles on university branding in the practitioner press, such as *Education Marketing*, (March 2003 and June 2002) and been cited in *PR week* (2003) and the *Daily Mail* (2009).

As well as this I have presented findings of the papers in this submission at nine International and National academic conferences detailed in the accompanying list of publications.

I also sit on the scientific review committee for the Academy of Marketing Special Interest Group for *Education Marketing,* having done so since late 2008, demonstrating increasing recognition as an expert in education marketing, and educational branding in particular. Since March 2009, I have also served on the editorial board of the *International Journal of Educational Advancement* as Associate Editor. Finally, I review papers for the *Journal of Brand Management*, the *Journal of Marketing in Higher Education,* the *Journal of Marketing Management* and the *Service Industries Journal.*

The above hopefully serves to demonstrate that I have made a unique and significant contribution to the area of branding, particularly in UK higher education.

2.0 Summary of the areas in which the research makes a contribution

My **particular contribution** to the area of branding in education has been in the following research areas identified above. In particular the work sought to explore:

- Acceptance and understanding of branding concepts in higher education

- Management of brands in higher education

- Objectives of branding in UK higher education

- Successful brands in UK higher education

- Limitations and criticisms of branding in higher education

- Models of brand management applicable to UK higher education

The areas identified in this section have been addressed   through the various research questions in the papers included in the submission. Whilst the actual objectives are set in the context of the individual papers, they also link together to a broader research objective of investigating and exploring the above bullet pointed topics. These are explored further in section 5.0.

3.0 Suitability for the award of PhD

My research has concentrated on exploring branding in the university context and in particular on examination of the factors affecting the conceptualisation and management of brands, with a view towards identifying brand values applicable to the specific qualities of higher education. This, it is envisaged, will contribute to knowledge in terms of advancing understanding of a gap in the literature (the lack of research conceived specifically for branding educational organisations) as well as informing practice in what is a contemporary and sometimes contentious topic (Jevons, 2006).

The evidence is reflected in the scholarly contribution through peer reviewed journal articles, conference presentations and papers, practitioner conference engagements and practitioner press articles and editorials.

This section provides evidence that the above research has made a significant contribution to knowledge and scholarship in this area. It should be viewed in conjunction with the accompanying list that shows the range of publications including refereed journals, published reports and press articles. The citations in **section 6.0** have been taken from the Google Scholar and ISI Web of Knowledge service for education.

As discussed in the preceding section, I have been asked to participate in a number of activities that demonstrate peer esteem. Subsequent sections consider the particular research areas, their corresponding refereed papers and their specific contribution to knowledge in relation to existing literature in the field. The purpose of this document overall is to demonstrate that my published work has made significant contribution to the literature that justifies the award of Doctor of Philosophy.

The contribution of each individual paper is articulated more fully in **Section 5.0,** but whilst this detail is important, it is also seems pertinent to summarise the overall contribution. Initially this involved understanding the issues surrounding branding in the context of universities; more particularly, the level of acceptance of branding in the sector and interpretation of the concept. The management of brands in the sector was explored, particularly in relation to understanding issues, challenges and implementation of branding in universities. During this work it became apparent that accountability and metrics were important issues and therefore the objectives of university branding were explored.

It also became apparent that the university stakeholder environment was complex and contributed to the need for an adapted branding approach. Therefore the stakeholders of universities were explored and, more particularly, the views of university leaders, as important brand guardians were investigated. The views of *external* stakeholders were also given particular relevance in the research.

Arguably the crux of the research was to explore the elusive topic of what are 'successful university brands' and the series of papers then concentrated on defining these , identifying which UK universities have them and whether commonalities exist that may help to add to our understanding of how to build a successful brand.

Overall then, the unique contribution of my work embraces understanding, conceptualising and managing university brands. Whilst I do not claim that all the questions are satisfied, it is argued that the work advances knowledge and understanding in these areas and highlights important future areas for ongoing empirical work.

3.1 UK vs International branding – justification for focus on UK HE sector

A number of studies have focused on the UK university sector (Veloutsou, Lewis and Patton, 2004; Bennett et al, 2007) as a good example to explore aspects of marketing associated activity. The UK university sector has experienced a period of rapid and often turbulent change (Baker and Balmer, 1997) in a move towards a quasi-commercial model and is therefore arguably a good example. The extent to which the findings of this work can be generalised to universities globally obviously varies, but comparison with other markets such as the United States, that went through the clash of cultures between traditional academic values and market focused values ten years earlier (Sanders, 1999; Kotler and Fox, 1995; Sevier, 2001) may be desirable.

3.2 Background and personal interest in the subject area.

Specifics of my profile have already been detailed in section 1.0. However, it was considered relevant to explain the context and background for my interest in researching brands in education, and particularly higher education.

The concept for this work originally evolved from my personal background in higher education marketing, where the limited knowledge, acceptance and existing work on educational branding concepts (at a time when they were becoming increasingly talked about in practitioner circles) was evident.

Limited understanding in the field was first noticeable when I was involved in work to understand the brand values and perceptions of a 'new' university, some 11 years ago. A number of factors became apparent; that there was little common understanding of branding within the university, that culturally the concept was difficult to implement, and that the literature gave little specific help or advice (other than in a generic consumer brand context).

My initial research investigated understanding and management approaches among those responsible for the brand. The wide variance in this became apparent and I began to look for applicable brand management models among the host of branding literature. It seemed that little really fitted the specific context and challenges of modern higher education, and what literature there was supported this conclusion.

At this point the concept for the series of papers evolved to try to clarify several related areas, among them the specific issues facing HE branding, the specifics of marketing implementation (such as metrics) and ultimately to understand what a successful university brand really was, how (and whether) it could be analysed and proactively managed (Including offering a conceptualisation model). The UK was chosen as the focus for a number of reasons outlined in the papers, but the intention

was ultimately to compare and contrast findings with universities internationally in future work outside this submission.

There seemed to be a wider value in this work; UK universities are largely publicly funded and spending on marketing activity is often contentious, both within institutions and with wider stakeholders. Therefore to attempt to improve efficiency and accountability of branding activity seemed to be not only topical but sensible and ethical.

3.3 Current weaknesses in existing knowledge that my research sought to address

Current weaknesses are explored in section 3.5 onwards, as well as the literature reviews of individual papers forming this submission, but in particular the series of papers in this research sought to address the lack of context specific conceptual models for branding in higher education (Rolfe, 2003; Hemlsey Brown and Olpatka, 2006).

A need for branding to become more of a rigorous science has been argued (Keller and Lehmann, 2006) but there was seemingly little work in the higher education context, particularly concerning conceptualisation, management and metrics. A fundamental lack of knowledge on what exactly institutional decision makers regards as comprising a university brand has been highlighted (Bennett et al, 2007). This seemed pertinent when there was evidence of increased pressure to assess the real value of branding activity for universities (Jevons, 2006). The perception of UK universities as publicly funded bodies adds to the contention surrounding spending money on branding.

There is some evidence of academics beginning to address the above issues (Waeraas and Solbakk, 2008; Bennett et al , 2007) but the need to add to and test this knowledge seems relevant and significant.

3.3.1 Epistemological and ontological issues

Consideration of the broad research philosophy is appropriate at this stage, although space does not allow much depth (and actual papers contain additional specifics). However, the work in this linked series of publications has a largely inductive philosophy, as theory will be generated from research (Bryman and Bell, 2007) and I sought to understand, explore and then look for patterns that may emerge (Patton, 2002). Whilst considering paradigms that allow the researcher to conceptualise the research, causes of social phenomena (e.g. *Brand success*) were sought (Patton, 2002).

3.4 Contemporaries of the author

It was considered important to contextualise my work among contemporaries writing in the area.

Work on branding in a generic context was underpinned by reference to widely published authors such as Aaker, Kapferer, Keller and to a lesser extent Osler and Riezebos . Related areas of corporate identity brought in authors such as Melewar and Akel, and Balmer, Gray and Fombrun in the field of corporate branding. My work to some extent sits within conceptual frameworks of corporate branding and therefore the work of Van Riels, Balmer and Fombrun is significant.

As the main focus of this research was UK specific the branding work of Leslie De Chernatony was widely used and cited, and a number of conceptual models and methodological approaches referred to his work. Francesca Dall Olmo Riley has also written in this area with a UK focus.

Limited work has been published in the area of non profit branding but the work of Philippa Hankinson has been influential over recent years. Other writers are working in overlapping areas such as Richard Hudson on NHS Brands, and Graham Hankinson, Dominic Medway and Gary Warnaby on place brands.

Education marketing is receiving increased attention from writers including Jane Hemsley-Brown, Paul Gibbs, Thorsten Gruber and Anthony Lowrie.

Finally the specific area of education branding has a number of writers such as Roger Bennett working in a UK context, and authors such as Villafane (Spain), Sevier (USA), and Waeraas and Solbakk (Norway) writing internationally. Their work has been influential in various ways as evidenced through citations throughout this work. The conceptual context of the applicants work and where it fits in with existing literature is clearly of importance. This is explored in *section 3.5.11* .

3.5 Extant knowledge in areas that relate to my work

Many authors suggest that there is an increased emphasis on branding in HE (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006) and it is pertinent to therefore examine existing knowledge and how it relates to my work.

3.5.1 Placing my work within major areas of the branding domain

Whilst writers argue that there is still no universally accepted definition of the word 'brand' (Ali-Choudhury, Bennett and Savani, 2007), there have been many efforts to resolve this (de Chernatony, 2009). It may be that it is not applicable to have one all encompassing definition (Gabbott and Jevons, 2009), but conceptualisation of branding in HE is part of my research. A retrospective examination of my work and the literature allows the suggestion of an initial definition of a successful university brand as "a clear and consistent synthesis of positioning, purpose and perception that differentiates an organisation and builds trust with stakeholders by communicating

rational and emotional values congruent with their needs". Whilst of value this does not necessarily place my work within any one paradigm, and therefore closer examination of these is necessary to consider the broader contribution.

A number of models of branding can be identified through the extant literature. Many of these can be conceptualised as opposites, or placed on a continuum. Whilst this may sometimes be an over simplification, it does serve to aid in conceptualising the many different variables to be considered, and variety of approaches to the task of branding an organisation. My work does not fundamentally disagree with existing conceptualisations of brands, in that holistic approaches are supported where a synthesis of elements is desirable to present a consistent brand to any stakeholder group, but a deconstructionist view is required to arrive at the right blend of those elements. Where my work does make an additional contribution is to consider the factors (which I have termed 'brand infrastructure') that support the analysis, construction and communication of the brand.

A word of caution is perhaps appropriate, however, as the issues surrounding modelling and conceptualising brands have "not been fully resolved at the level of laws or empirical generalisations" (Keller and Lehmann, 2006, p.755) and may never totally be resolved into one neat definition (Gabbott and Jevons, 2009). It is appropriate at this point therefore, to briefly discuss the relationship between university brands and the key areas of services, corporate and internal branding.

3.5.2 Service brands

It is widely accepted that service brands are different from product brands in a number of respects (Gronroos, 1998), and higher education is a service. It is interesting that service brands arguably function to reduce risk of intangibility (de Chernatony and Segal Horne, 2003) and this could be argued to be important to an HE brand. Viewing

HE as a service brand, however, does not necessarily greatly increase understanding. It has been suggested that there is a dearth of literature about how to build successful service brands (de Chernatony, Drury and Segal-Horn 2005) and my work attempts to address one aspect of this, identifying successful HE brands (based on expert opinion and peer evaluation) and then analysing the 'make up' of these brands. Placing a service centered logic at the centre of the HE brand (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) is arguably a means of conceptualisation and my work highlights the importance in the HE context of 'clear leadership' and 'internal buy in' to the subsequent 'experiential' element of HEIs as service brands. The area of service brand theory clearly informs areas of specialist branding such as HE brands (Hudson, 2009), but wider investigation of other areas of the branding domain needs to be undertaken to increase applicability.

3.5.3 Corporate brands (and corporate identity)

These terms may be conceptualised differently, although there is a common purpose in universities seeking to communicate their unique characteristics in an effective way to all stakeholders (Melewar and Akel, 2005). Corporate identity has been studied for UK universities (Melewar and Akel, 2005) and it was suggested that the focus could be a rather narrow one, concentrating on corporate communication and visual identity, neglecting wider elements such as behavior, corporate culture and market conditions. Corporate branding is generally accepted to be a more all encompassing conceptualisation, including reputation, brand identity and corporate image (Aaker, 1996; Balmer , 2001; Fombrun and Shanley, 1990). Corporate branding in the higher education sector can be pursued through two paths, it is suggested; firstly though the promotion of internal values, culture and vision (Schultz and de Chernatony, 2002; Balmer and Greyser, 2003), or alternatively externally focused on the marketing of

the brand (Aaker, 2004; King, 1991). This is a useful distinction but (considering the generally acknowledged broadness of what is meant by a 'brand') the two are surely not mutually exclusive and a brand could and should take account of both of these approaches?

Consideration of the *corporate brand* also leads to consideration of their relationship with individual *product brands*. Corporate brands are generally perceived to be more complex than product brands, principally because the corporate brand is intangible and organisations consist of people whose attitudes and beliefs vary greatly (Waerass and Solbakk, 2008). My investigation of university brands naturally draws more particularly on work on corporate brands as part of its conceptual framework. Certainly the suggestion that corporate brands need to look beyond 'customers' to a more all encompassing stakeholder environment (Roper and Davies, 2007) resonates clearly with work on university branding.

Brand is seemingly a term that needs a great deal more exploration, through consideration of the extant literature. However, the foremost among the current paradigms in branding are subsequently explored in this document.

3.5.4 Internal branding

For some time writers such as Free (1999) have been discussing the importance of internal branding and these discussions demonstrate a degree of commonality and overlap with service branding theory. Free (1999) argues that branding a service is about the way activities are carried out and the internal workings of the organisation. This certainly resonates with university branding work as some work discusses the importance of the experience as a method of differentiation in universities and the role of people within that (Dibb and Simkin,1993; Waeraas and Solbakk, 2008) .

Whilst it can therefore be argued that university brands seem to have a number of characteristics that align them with corporate brands and service brands, the influence of internal branding is undoubtedly also relevant (Hudson, 2009). These areas of theory, whilst important and informative, do not 'tell the entire story'. The theories of destination branding also inform arguments and models (Hankinson, 2009; Medway and Warnaby, 2008; Hankinson, 2004) , as a university brand is undoubtedly synonymous with its location to some degree. The existing writing on university brands, in summary, seems to be best informed by work on corporate, services, internal and destination branding. However, whilst elements of all theses bodies of knowledge are applicable the particular role, culture and constitution of universities requires a bespoke approach that is informed by these areas. This is a founding rationale of the work in this submission.

3.5.5 Holistic perspectives of brand vs. block building approaches

Attempts to treat organisational identity as 'holistic' are likely to produce resistance and conflicts in universities (Waeraas and Solbakk, 2008) and approaches that tend towards 'block building' seem prevalent in the limited work addressing HE brands, such as Ali-Choudhury, Bennett and Savani (2009), who identify university brands as having ten main components (such as 'location' and 'ambience') and locate these within 'three major concepts running through prior brand research': a collection of promises, a collection of realties and the symbolic elements of the brand. These three concepts resonate with work such as Hankinson and Cowking (1993) and my work also has many parallels with this conceptualisation.

Within this sub heading it is appropriate to examine the conceptual framework offered by 'parent dominated' vs 'parent silent brands': The idea of an overall strong identity under which all services are offered is termed as a 'parent dominated brand' (Hudson,

2009) such as Virgin or Single Hospital Trust. This is aka an 'individual brand' (Adcock et al , 2001) as opposed to 'parent silent brands', such as Leicester NHS Trust, that has 3 hospitals under its control but with individual brands that have stronger brand equity than the parent brand. Associated Newspapers is a similar commercial example. Most university brands are 'parent dominated brands', but there is surely a danger of sub brands pulling them 'the other way' to emphasise the prevalence of individual school or faculty brands?

Imperial is seen as parent dominated brand as it has credibility and offers benefit to its stakeholders in its own right. This is also called a 'multi brand' (Adcock et al, 2001) or 'umbrella brand' (Hudson, 2009). When developing these brands, the challenge is that there are many varied groups of stakeholders, and universities (in common with NHS Trusts) are complex organisations. It may be very difficult to identify and illustrate the brand succinctly for such an organisation and therefore the 'deconstructionist', 'pragmatic' and 'block building' views of brands already discussed are more applicable to underpin the conceptual framework (Hudson, 2009). The key may be to adopt a stakeholder specific branding approach whilst aligning brand with organisational values and objectives (Hudson, 2009). My work supports that of Hudson (2009) but extends it to apply to the HE sector and critiques elements that may not fully apply, such as the disparity between a name and who is actually providing a service, suggested as evident in NHS brands. Another significant area of contribution is in the success factors associated with university brands. To some extent my work challenges that of Ali-Choudhury, Bennett and Savani (2007) in that somewhat different elements are identified, but this may be due to the fact that my factors are those that facilitate a successful brand (the 'brand infrastructure', in my own terms), rather than the actual specific values of success.

3.5.6 Components of brand strategy

Ultimately, any brand needs to be communicated to the market. Brand strategy is therefore valid as a consideration of the wider holistic idea of brand management. My investigation of the elements of 'successful' university brands links to two of the components of brand strategy: brand values and brand personality (Osler, 2003). Once the successful brand elements are identified, it is argued, these can be placed within the brand values and brand personality and then communicated through brand positioning, ultimately contributing to the brand architecture (Upshaw, 1997). It is within identifying the contributing components of the brand architecture that my research sits and therefore makes part of its contribution to knowledge.

In particular the concept of brand architecture as articulated by the above cited work was extended in the university context by what could be termed the 'brand infrastructure'; this encompasses the factors that allow the brand architecture to be constructed and communicated, such as vision, internal support, leadership and experience. Little previous work has sought to explore these factors, and as they are, to some extent, particularly applicable to the HE context, it is argued that the contribution to knowledge here is of note. The 2010 paper *What defines 'successful' university brands?* is an example of this contribution.

3.5.7 Evolving service dominant logic for marketing

The work of writers such as Vargo and Lusch (2004) has been important in terms of questioning some of the underlying assumptions about marketing concepts. My work resonates with the suggestion of a service centered perspective that looks for higher order core competencies as a key to competitive advantage that a brand could and should encapsulate. Perhaps what should be striven for in conceptualising a university brand is a 'largely humanistic, relationship driven model that involves dialogues with

stakeholders' (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), but whether the structures currently exist to allow this in practice is another matter.

Ultimately, however, universities comprise 'specialised human knowledge and skills' (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, p.15) and a more service centered dominant logic of marketing seems sits more easily with the conceptualisation of a knowledge based service such as a university as a brand. Where my work perhaps adds to this interesting conceptual model is in identifying barriers to implementation and in identifying a service centered relationship driven model. Understanding the 'experience' and 'internal support and buy in' are two areas that I identified as needing further research.

3.5.8 Paradigms of non-profit branding.

There has been limited work on the area of non profit branding, but a number of conceptualisations are evident. Hankinson (2004) in his 'Relational Network Model' of place brands essentially sees brands as a series of 'relationships' with stakeholders. There is argued to be a fundamental lacuna of knowledge in higher education on 'what exactly institutional decision takers regard as comprising a university brand' (Bennett, Ali-Choudhury and Savani, 2007) but some work has begun to explore this, and is within this 'gap in the knowledge' that my work makes a contribution. The specific contribution is explored to some extent under the overlapping section 3.5.5 above.

3.5.9 The Dominant social paradigm

It may be appropriate, when considering branding conceptualisations (and the location of my work within these) to actually think in a somewhat wider context. The Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) can be defined as the values, beliefs, institutions and habits that collectively provide social lenses through which individuals and

groups interpret their social world (Milbrath, 1984). It has been argued that much research on attitudes fails to consider the early genesis of those attitudes (Kilbourne, Beckmann and Thelen, 2002) , and it may be that there are significant antecedent conditions that affect attitudes in any discipline. It could therefore be suggested that attitudes to education, and universities in particular, should be considered in the context of the DSP at the time, and (as the DSP varies between countries and cultures) and the location. More precisely, this would entail considering the effect of the political, technological and economic dimensions of the DSP (Kilbourne, Beckmann and Thelen, 2002) on branding in the higher education sector.

The original work was not conceptualised within the DSP of the time, but this does not mean that retrospective application cannot shed light on the findings within the work and it is therefore suggested as a future consideration for research.

3.5.10 US vs. European conceptualisations of brands.

There is some evidence of varying conceptualisations of brands between Europe and the U.S. (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998), typified by the writings of Aaker (1991) and Kapferer (1992) which seemingly differ in interpretation of the term 'brand', and in the value systems which underpin the concept of branding. This dichotomy has also been termed as the European perspective of viewing brand in 'poetic terms' as opposed to the American deconstructionist view of brands as scientific measurable financial assets. Placing university brands in a philosophical context aids their fundamental understanding, and it is argued that my work contributes to this process.

3.5.11 Summary of where my work sits with regard to conceptualisations and models discussed.

This work should be prefaced by the somewhat cautionary note that the issues surrounding and conceptualising brands have not been fully resolved as empirical generalisations (Keller and Lehmann, 2006) and there may never be a unifying model of brand (Gabbott and Jevons, 2009). Therefore in any conceptual model, however carefully underpinned by extant knowledge, there is a degree of subjective interpretation. Effort was made to minimise this by clearly stating assumptions and definitions surrounding brands and in particular successful brands contained within the various papers.

The holistic conceptualisation of branding is undoubtedly important (de Chernatony and Dall Olmo Riley, 1998) in terms of seeking to arrive at a distinct brand position in the marketplace. However, the very nature of my work requires a 'deconstructionist' view as it seeks to arrive at the underpinning significant constructs in a university brand. Therefore it tends more towards the 'American school of branding' (that encompasses a scientific, deconstructionist view) (McWilliam,1993).

My work echoes calls for a 'pragmatic approach' to branding that that builds on the variety that exists within a university (Waeraas and Solbakk, 2008). This, it is argued, may go against standard conceptions of branding to some extent but offers flexibility and takes some account of the complexity of a university. It also takes account of views such as Gabbott and Jevons (2009) that argue that brand context is important. My work also draws upon Hudson's (2009) work on parent dominated brands to some extent.

As discussed in *section 3.5.6*, the applicant's investigation of the elements of 'successful' university brands links to two of the components of brand strategy; brand values and brand personality (Osler, 2003). It is suggested that it is within identifying

these contributing components of the brand architecture that my work sits in the conceptual framework and therefore makes part of its contribution to knowledge. De Chernatony's (2007) work seeking to define brands also helps, at a broad level, to contextualise the conceptual framework as my work investigates what may be termed the 'input based' elements of a brand (as opposed to 'output based' and 'time based', which are relevant, but particularly apply to the subsequent brand strategy communication.)

The research approach had certain commonalities with related papers by de Chernatony, Drury and Segal-Horn (2005) and Bennett, Ali-Choudhury and Savani (2007) in that it identified successful service brands using expert and peer opinion. Their work was somewhat different in that it sought to identify components of a brand, but not necessarily *successful* ones.

Universities have a better chance of becoming strong brands if they are allowed to express their unique strength and virtues, however inconsistent; they can then hope to avoid the 'conformity trap' (Waeraas and Solbakk, 2008). This, it is argued, may require a reconceptualisation of what universities offer to understand the unique service offering (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) at the heart of the brand.

4.0 Overall methodology for series of research papers

The methodologies in the constituent papers in this submission were originally conceived as 'parts of a greater whole' to form an overall methodology. The conceptualisation for this methodology was to explore and investigate issues surrounding branding and brands in the context of higher education and look for a common approach that may aid future brand management in the sector. Whilst clearly the rigorous individual methodologies are explained and justified within each of the papers comprising this submission (and therefore do not need to be repeated verbatim here), the purpose of this section is to demonstrate how the various methodologies link together from a research philosophy through to particular research objectives. The overall approach was conceived as largely inductive, as theory will be generated from research (Bryman and Bell, 2007) , but within this each paper has its own subtly differing philosophy that corresponds to the stage of the wider research process. These are outlined in the individual papers and translated into research questions as articulated in section 5.0

4.1 Qualitative methodologies in the submitted papers; samples, coding and analysis

The purpose of this section is to expand upon the methodologies in the papers that make up this submission, and therefore to articulate their rigour in terms of the contribution to the PhD.

The rationale for this is that academic papers have finite word counts and therefore the opportunity to demonstrate the care and rigour of the analysis may be limited. This section therefore allows for elaboration and specifics of methodologies to be discussed and this will be undertaken by briefly highlighting aspects of the methodological approach of each paper, and then addressing some overall points.

The earlier papers in the submission, particularly ***The Real Impact of Integrated Marketing Communications on Colleges and Universities, Interpretation and implementation of reputation/brand management by UK university leaders*** and ***Do universities have successful brand?*** were broadly similar in their sample selection technique and qualitative analysis approach, although the 2005 paper involved a larger sample (40 interviewees) drawn from two complementary groups with slightly different perspectives on the same topic. Interview schedules were used, generally with open questions to encourage respondents to discuss the issues in question and 'tell their own stories about events and processes in their organisations' (Jones, Vlachos, Wheeler and Dimitratos, 2008).

 All the papers employed a content analysis approach. This was chosen as the method of in order to reduce qualitative data and "take a volume of qualitative material and attempt to identify core consistencies and meanings" (Patton, 2002, p.453). The approach was inductive in that I was attempting to discover themes and categories in the data and findings emerged from the data through the researcher's interactions with it (Patton, 2002).

In practical terms, each paper's analysis started with cassette or digital recordings of raw data, and subsequently transcripts "that constitute the undigested complexity of reality" (Patton, 2002, p.463).

Therefore the initial steps of coding, classification and categorising the data were common and developing a manageable coding system was the first step of analysis, although broad themes were often in place, drawn from the research problem (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

I was mindful that qualitative analysis of an exploratory nature seeks richer data (Daymon and Holloway, 2004) and, that, whilst computer software can aid in many

aspects of this analysis, it may be ultimately best carried out by human beings (Patton, 2002). Analysis of these papers was undertaken in what Patton (2002) terms the 'traditional' manner that involved the following steps:

1. Read all interview transcripts and make notes in margins or on post-it notes as categories emerged.

2. Group the content into the themes; this stage concerned developing the coding categories and was undertaken by writing relevant codes onto the transcripts.

3. Another read through to undertake the formal coding in a more systematic manner.

4. The themes and coding system were discussed with an independent researcher to ensure agreement and validity. Small adjustments were made where necessary. Simple percentage agreement was calculated.

5. Further readings of the paper were undertaken to generate richer data in terms of quotes which can bring qualitative data to life. "Converting words into numbers and then tossing away the words gets a researcher into all sorts of mischief" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.56) and whilst the coding system is clearly critical, the quotes have a very real role to play in presenting the findings in my papers.

This overall approach is broadly in line with key writers such as Miles and Huberman (1994), Patton (2002), Schilling (2006), Daymon and Holloway (2002) and Neuendorf (2002).

The papers varied slightly in that some started with broad themes in place, with questions that corresponded to these areas of investigation, and other work was more open in that   themes needed to be generated from the data. The approach of a 'provisional list of codes prior to fieldwork that comes from the conceptual framework, list of research questions, problem or variables that the researcher brings to the study' is one preferred by Miles and Huberman (1994). My work tended to

increasingly build on my preceding papers by bringing in provisional codes based on the findings of other papers in the series, but always there was a degree of flexibility (as befits the open exploratory nature of the research) as new codes developed or were suggested.

The paper Chapleo (2007) ***Barriers to Brand Building in UK Universities'*** (in common with the 2004 paper) utilised a judgement sample of UK university chief executives was inductive in that in sought to illuminate categories from the phenomenon suggested in the previous papers in this series, utilising an interview guide. This demonstrates the cohesive aspect to the series of papers, as findings of earlier work suggest areas for subsequent study (an approach that recurs throughout the papers).

Chapleo (2007) utilised a broadly similar content analysis approach to previous papers discussed above, as all interview were transcribed , notes made in margins as categories emerged, and the content was grouped into the themes by relevant codes written onto the transcripts. The themes and coding system was agreed via an intercoder agreement with an independent researcher. As this is similar to the method employed in the other papers, it is pertinent to explain the specific process as an example:

- A simple percent agreement was calculated, based upon the agreements divided by the total number of measures (Neuendorf, 2002; Miles and Huberman, 1994). This was undertaken for each of the broad exploratory questions and then the figures totaled to calculate the percent agreement.

- In this particular case the figure was 82%, but it is accepted that percent agreement has limitations and therefore Scotts Pi was subsequently calculated.

The Scotts Pi figure for the overall data was **.681** Scott's Pi was used to investigate this chance agreement, as it explores the joint distribution across the two coders that takes account of any proportion of coder's agreement being due to chance and the calculated figure indicates, at the two extremes, agreement at chance level (0.00) to perfect agreement (1.00). Therefore a figure of .681 is considered an acceptable level of agreement, especially as Scotts Pi has been argued to be 'overly conservative' (Neuendorf, 2002).

It is recognised that simple percentage agreement has its limitations, in particular that it fails to account fully for chance agreement, but in fact a degree of 'range agreement' (Neuendorf, 2002) was factored in to address this ; in particular terms that were judged by both researchers to 'come within a certain distance of one another' were grouped together. It may be argued that this is inevitable where subjective expression is concerned, and as long as both researchers agree those ranges of similar terms then it is appropriate for the approach.

Scott's Pi was used to investigate this chance agreement, as it explores the joint distribution across the two coders that takes account of any proportion of coder's agreement being due to chance and the calculated figure indicates, at the two extremes, agreement at chance level (0.00) to perfect agreement (1.00). Therefore a figure of .681 is considered an acceptable level of agreement, especially as Scotts Pi has been argued to be 'overly conservative' (Neuendorf, 2002).

Overall, it was also considered important to maintain a degree of consistency across the related papers in terms on analytical approaches, and therefore whilst I became aware of other methods and approaches as the papers progressed, I maintained a broadly similar technique.

Chapleo (2008) *External Perceptions of Successful University Brands*, was primarily different in its sampling; I sought to explore similar areas to previous papers that overlapped with those in the 2004, 2005 and 2007 papers, but (again demonstrating the interconnectivity of the research) the respondents were a convenience sample from various external opinion formers, suggested as being an important stakeholder group from findings of earlier papers and extant literature. The simple percentage agreement figure was calculated at 79% and a calculation of Scotts Pi gave a figure of .686

Chapleo(2010) *What defines 'successful' university brands?* employed a similar inductive methodology that sought to put flesh on the bones of constructs (Miles and Huberman , 1994) and as such an interview guide was used, but interviewees were allowed to expand on topics as they wished within the context of the aims. The 22 interviewees sourced were selected through a judgement sample of suitable opinion formers in UK universities (as explained in the paper). Again interviews were recorded and transcribed and themes and coding were explored. A similar validation process to the 2007 and 2008 papers was utilised with an independent researcher (a Research Assistant) checking the results, and in particular the coding. The percentage agreement in the content was calculated at 84% and Scotts Pi of .732 recorded.

Chapleo and Simms (2010) *Stakeholder Identification and Prioritisation in the Higher Education Sector: A Case Study of the University of Portsmouth* was somewhat of a departure as it employed stakeholder investigation. This can be appropriate for building new theory (Yin, 1984) and the purpose was to generate theory from the findings. The analysis was again undertaken through coding, and both the authors undertook this independently with a view to intercoder agreement. This was informed by Reed et al (2009) Schilling (2006) and Miles and Huberman (1994).

The most recent items in the submission, such as Chapleo *Objectives of university branding activity* (accepted November 2010 and awaiting publication) and the peer reviewed book chapter Chapleo *et al* (2010) *The Marketisation of Higher Education* explored an issue that became apparent during the work for the other papers; that there seemed to be little work on objectives for branding activity in universities. This again demonstrates the interconnectivity of the work as issues that emerged through inductive work were taken up and used as the basis for subsequent 'sub- exploration'. It was therefore again an exploratory paper based upon 20 interviews with opinion formers that sought a collective view. An interview guide was utilised, interviews were conducted by telephone with largely open questioning, and these were transcribed. Thereafter an independent Research Assistant was employed to agree the identified dimensions and the coding, and to view the summary conclusions in the context of the findings to improve validity, although a degree of subjective judgement is part of the value of this research approach. This approach is consistent with that employed in my 2007, 2008 and 2010 papers.

This peer reviewed book chapter utilised and combined research conducted to explore aspects of the purpose of branding a university and how it should be measured, and as such employs a broadly similar methodological approach. The coding in this work and checking by an independent Research Assistant is therefore the same as that in other papers but the data was revisited and broad themes and codings again checked to arrive at a simple percentage agreement calculation of 77% and a Scotts Pi figure of .585.

Overall, the sampling approaches specified in these papers, combined with the broadly complementary and rigorous analytical approach to content analysis, coding and reliability, hopefully demonstrates the cohesiveness of this body of work and its

contribution to knowledge. To summarise, it may be argued that "without rigour, research is worthless and loses its utility" (Morse et al 2002, p. 2). It is considered that the verification processes outlined in this section underpin the validity and reliability that are essential to demonstrating the rigour of this overall body of work.

5.0 Contribution to knowledge of specific papers

The purpose of this section is to briefly summarise the individual papers and articulate where they have contributed the knowledge in the discipline, and where links exist between the published papers that demonstrate their relationships as part of a whole.

5.1 Acceptance and understanding of branding concepts in UK higher education

Initially it was considered important to establish concepts surrounding the conceptualisation and application of branding theory to higher education. This was the motivation of research exploring senior UK university marketing personnel's attitudes to branding, in the paper ***The Real Impact of Integrated Marketing Communications on Colleges and Universities*** A practitioner version of this also appeared in *Education Marketing* in June 2002.

This paper contributed to knowledge and advanced practice in terms of:

1. Those responsible for the marketing of UK universities did consider that they had a brand but there was a degree of variance evident among this sample of higher education marketing professionals. This clearly points to the need for a consistent conceptualisation of what is meant a brand in higher education in order for it to be successful. This is inextricably linked to the particular qualities of branding in higher education, explored in my subsequent papers.

2. The majority of UK university brands appear to be based on historical legacies, rather than deliberately engineered brands. This in itself may not necessarily be

problematic, but clearly has implications for brand modeling and management, as decisions need to be made to present the desired values rather than those arrived at by default.

3. It has been argued that universities may be too complex to be encapsulated by one brand or identity definition (Waeraas and Solbakk, 2008) and this certainly was supported in my paper. This led to problems through a pull to sub-brands and a lack of clear internal brand identity. Overall it was suggested in this paper that points of differentiation identified by respondents were often those of 'generic UK higher education', rather than particularly specific to the organisation. Waeraas and Solbakk (2008) warn against this 'conformity trap' of trying to create too simplistic a brand for a university.

4. Some personnel at a senior strategic level are not perceived to have a clear understanding of branding concepts. Lack of senior management support was considered a key issue in some UK universities and this suggested subsequent research, including assessing the views of leaders of UK universities (or 'brand guardians').

This work resulted in the paper *Interpretation and implementation of reputation/brand management by UK university leaders* as well as an industry report in late March 2003.

Overall the paper and report explored how the strategic leaders of UK universities envisaged and implemented branding as a concept and practice.

It made a contribution to knowledge through identifying the need for a specific conceptual understanding of brands applicable to universities. This was particularly emphasised in this research in terms of three aspects that in the view of respondents,

made brand building in universities 'challenging. These are explored fully in the papers but were essentially:

- A tension between overall institutional brand and faculty sub brands.

- Difficulty in internal brand management through 'internal buy in'.

- Difficulty in isolating a simple brand message in a large, complex, diverse institution.

Whilst the contribution to academic knowledge is clearly the main focus of this commentary, the findings and conclusions were also disseminated to practitioner audiences through the industry report mentioned above, the article 'What the leaders saw' in *Education Marketing,* and presentations at *CASE, HEIST* and *HEERA* conferences in 2003. In a discipline such as Education Marketing, the close relationship between theory and practice is important and it is argued that the above forms another significant element of the contribution to knowledge of my work.

5.2 Management of brands in higher education

For some time there have been calls for UK universities to undertake a more considered approach to marketing activities (Bakewell and Gibson-Sweet, 1998), and some argue that progress has been made in this respect (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006) although there still may be some way to go.

Research in the paper ***Barriers to Brand Building in UK*** sought to understand some of the specific qualities of university brands and barriers to implementing branding approaches.

Two key conclusions offered by these papers resonate with available literature and suggest further work:

- The variance apparent in university management approaches to branding.

- The particular qualities of universities make commercial branding approaches unsuitable. In itself this may be proposed to be part of the contribution to knowledge, supporting arguments that a new approach or even a new paradigm of branding may be needed (Holt, 2002) and laying foundations for bespoke models of branding applicable to the particular qualities of the higher education (HE) sector. The author concedes, however, that questions or barriers facing HE branding, whilst useful to highlight future research needs, do not begin to address the challenges. Therefore the research agenda for this series of papers needed to be moved towards outcomes that could form the basis for future solutions. These were implemented in the paper in section 5.4.

5.3 Objectives of branding in UK higher education

Exploring rationales for branding a university; should we be seeking to measure branding in UK universities? (Accepted November 2010 and awaiting publication) During research for the previous papers a gap in the knowledge was seemingly apparent; that there seemed to be limited explicit clear objectives for some university branding activity. Therefore this research and subsequent paper was conceived to address this and explores the views of those responsible for these brands on the precise purpose of branding activity.

The paper's contribution to knowledge included:

1. Exploration of objectives of branding activity within UK universities. Over recent years considerable effort and resource has been put into branding activity within universities (Rolfe, 2003; Stamp, 2004) and yet the precise purpose of this may sometimes be less than explicit. In a time of decreasing funding for UK universities, expenditure on branding activity may be contentious and therefore it is argued that investigation of purpose and whether resources are judiciously allocated may be of

considerable practical value. In theoretical terms, it is argued that clear understanding of what branding programmes within universities seek to achieve is important to the conceptualisation and application of any model of brand for a university.

5.4 Successful brands in UK higher education

Further research considered which UK universities were considered to have 'successful' brands in the paper ***Do universities have successful brands*** and explored commonalities underpinning these brands.

This paper made a contribution in the following areas:

- An exploration of the factors underpinning successful brands to move towards understanding commonalities and therefore how commercial branding models might be adapted to support the university sector.

- Exploring whether a fundamental reassessment of what is meant by a brand in the context of higher education is needed. Commercial brands have traditionally been understood in terms of 'logical structures' (Kay, 2006) but these seem open to some degree of debate for successful university brands. The pragmatic approach that builds on the variety within the organisation has been suggested as a way forward (Waeraas and Solbakk, 2008) but this issue may require a deeper future reassessment in terms of this research.

In subsequent papers the institutions with 'successful' brands were investigated in terms of commonalities of approach or circumstance. This work was published as ***What defines 'successful' university brands?***

This paper and ***Do universities have successful brands*** have a degree of overlap and may be argued to have made a combined contribution to knowledge in several areas:

- That no clear link is apparent between successful UK university brands and the amount of money spent on marketing communications, or indeed the size of the marketing department.

- That public relations does seem to be linked to successful UK university brands. The specific use of 'PR' as a tool and stakeholder management through PR is an area identified for future work and the paper *Stakeholder Identification and Prioritisation: A Case Study of The University of Portsmouth* began to investigate this area.

Two other factors were suggested by the respondents in these papers to be particularly associated with successful UK university brands. The first of these may be termed 'buy in' or 'engagement' with staff; internal marketing appears to be important to successful UK university brands, but is often difficult to manage due to organisational culture.

Secondly, a 'clear vision' is necessary. Indeed, a clear longer term strategic vision from management may be the single most important factor in building a successful university brand. It is conceded that clearly more empirical work on wider samples is needed in these areas, but it is also argued that identification and consideration of these factors in the particular context of university branding moves current knowledge closer to a model and conceptualisation of branding that takes particular account of universities qualities, barriers and needs.

Ultimately the paper *What defines 'successful' university brands?* identified the specific variables associated with successful university brands and these are suggested to constitute an initial form of conceptual model, but one that clearly needs fully conceptualising and testing through further empirical work.

5.4.1 External Perceptions of Successful University Brands

The paper *External Perceptions of Successful University Brands* explores some of the same areas as the *What defines Successful University* but considers the particular view of external opinion formers – an important and specific audience that became apparent during previous stages of the work.

This paper therefore highlights several factors:

- That many UK universities communicate their current brand reasonably well to key audiences such as students, but fail to do so consistently across all less obvious stakeholder groups. This has subsequently been addressed in my paper *Stakeholder Identification and Prioritisation in the Higher Education Sector: A Case Study of the University of Portsmouth* . This work was also presented to practitioner audiences at *Discovering Futures* in London in April 2009.

- A particular area that has not been previously highlighted but was suggested in this research was that, in terms of branding activity, universities may undersell themselves in areas that they do not see as of immediate strategic importance, through allocation of finite communications resources.

- The perceived success of a number of UK university brands, in particular Warwick. This has reinforced the desirability of looking more closely at this institution's approaches to branding, perhaps along the lines of a previous case study examination of this institution (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2002). Case study research may form the basis for future deeper investigation of particular successfully branded universities.

5.5 An absolute measure of university success?; a comparison between external league tables of UK universities and identified 'successful brands'.

Whilst validity is the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects what humans agree on as the real meaning of a concept (Babbie,1995), the process of augmenting the rigour of your approach and ensuring your thinking is transparent is also critical (Quinton and Smallbone, 2006). The validity the research was given consideration and it was considered that it would add value to consider the results of the author's research in respect of external league tables, which are an increasingly important source of information for many consumers and offer a point of comparison. *The Times Good University Guide* is considered to be the most influential national league table for the UK, followed by *The Guardian University Guide*, and *The Sunday Times University Guide* and also *The National Student Survey*. On an international scale the THES-QS World University Rankings and the SJTU ARWU were also considered important. (HEFCE, 2008).

It was of interest that, since the inception of league tables, six UK institutions have always appeared in the top 10 of the three foremost national league tables. These are:

- Imperial College London

- London School of Economics and Political Science

- University College London

- University of Cambridge

- University of Oxford

- University of Warwick

This is significant when viewed against the sample of UK institutions considered to have 'successful brands' in my research where there a large degree of commonality. HEFCE's findings (2008) suggested that the majority of UK HEIs have taken or take

strategic decisions that were based upon (or at least informed) by league tables. The question, in the context of this research, would seem to be the extent to which league table position and branding success are synonymous? Does the presence of league tables change the conception of branding in the sector, as there is an increasing focus as league table position as a measure of success among some target groups?

This also brings into question the relationship between reputation and branding. HEFCE (2008, p.53) talk of "national league tables generally ending up confirming institutional reputation".

However, the relationship between league tables and successful brands is clearly not an exact one. Several institutions suggested in this research to have successful brands feature comparatively lowly in league tables.

HEFCE suggest that commercial league tables in the UK avoid disrupting the dominant expectations too much – this includes assumptions such as that 'Oxbridge' will come near the top and that most pre 1992 universities will be above most post 1992 universities. This perhaps illustrates the essence of the difference between a successful brand and a league table position, as this research suggests that an institution that is comparatively lowly placed in the league tables can nevertheless have a successful brand with its key (often niche?) target audiences.

There certainly seems to be a role for branding over and above a focus on league table positioning alone. HEFCE (2008, p.54) argue that " league tables may be influential, but only part of the complex decision making process and often used to confirm a decision already made". A strong brand should communicate far more about strengths in key areas than the often narrow league table placing indicator. If used appropriately, branding could build upon league table positioning, whether that be high, middle or low, by emphasising unique selling points?

This idea has already been embraced to some extent. HECFE talk of "an enduring reluctance to distinguish between institutions with different missions and compare like for like" (2008, p.56). In the US and Canada for example, league table compilers compare institutions based on mission and nature of provision.

'Experience' is suggested (2008, p.57) as an area where an institution that is not highly placed on traditional league tables could focus branding activity and hope to build differentiation; this corresponds with my findings.

In the context of this research it was considered desirable to consider the results of the investigation of which UK universities had successful brands against any available perceived 'absolute' measure of university success. Whilst it is conceded that league tables are not directly comparable with branding in all respects, *The Times Good University Guide,* as the 'most influential' (HEFCE, 2008) represents a good starting point for comparison and further investigation. This is therefore suggested as a further stage of this research.

In conclusion, this commentary articulates a series of linked refereed papers on the area of branding that concerns understanding, conceptualising and managing university brands. The eleven years since the original conceptualisation of the research represents a considerable personal and academic 'journey'. Earlier research papers began to explore the limited academic work that had been undertaken which seemed curious as at the same time the funding and political environment were necessitating increased practitioner interest. The research quickly evolved and progressed, with one paper often shaping subsequent work, and is now at the point where I have now built up a unique body of work that I believe, whilst not answering all the questions, adds considerably to the current knowledge and debate in the field of branding in education. My increased involvement in the academic community is

evidenced through the listed citations and involvement in academic journals and interest groups, and at the same time I have engaged the practitioner community wherever possible.

This area will continue to evolve and grow and I will continue to make a significant contribution not just to branding in higher education, but in the wider context of branding in non profit organisations.

6.0 Citations

Updated 22 September 2010

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ABSTRACT. The paper extends Aaker's previous empirical work on brand personality by exploring
whether Swedish Universities communicate distinctive brand personalities in cyberspace. Employing
a multistage methodology, data are drawn from the English Web sites of 17 Swedish **...**
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(1959), "Introduction by the joint editors", in Bereday, G., Lauwerys, J. (Eds),The Yearbook of Education, Evans Bros, in association with the University of London Institute of Education and Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY, . **...** Babbidge, H., Rosenzweig, **...**
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Resumo Os "activos intangíveis" – como a identidade, a imagem, a reputação ou a marca – têm
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Abstract Reputation and brand management are topical issues in UK higher education but previous
research has often focused on marketing practitioners within higher education (HE) institutions
rather than the senior strategic leaders. This paper, however, examines university chief **...**

Is Communications a Strategic Activity in UK Education?
C Chapleo - International Journal of Educational …, 2006 - ingentaconnect.com

Abstract This qualitative exploratory paper investigates whether communications / public relations
is regarded by opinion formers in UK education as a strategic business activity or a tactical marketing
tool. It is based upon depth interviews with 16 senior managers with strategic roles in UK **...**

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