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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

1.1 Rationale for the research

The following dissertation examines whether a company's implementation of internal marketing can be meaningfully associated with the manner in which employees relate to the company's brand. It also examines whether this link may be associated with impacts on service delivery. It is positioned within the academic literature on marketing and human resource management, such that it is understood that are important conceptual links between brand management, internal marketing, internal communication, company culture, and human resource management processes that are worthy of investigation.

As indicated in Figure 1.1, such processes cannot be understood or worked with in isolation, and that the value in any particular company activity is gained from understanding how processes overlap and how different corporate structures integrate within a company culture. Learning how this operates for a particular company requires investigation that is based in a deep understanding of the industry within which that company is situated. In this instance, conducting a case study within the airline industry required a research team that had detailed experientially-based understanding of the complexity of how the industry functions.



Figure 1.1 Interaction of concepts underpinning the research

It is established within the relevant literature that company culture is not something static that can readily be captured, but is a fluid process that is constantly developing and changing. It was proposed to examine such dynamic processes as they emerged for CityJet, an expanding regional Irish-based airline that was significantly changing its business plan. Conducting this research as a case study provided an opportunity to look in detail at how that process unfolded and how it was experienced by employees. In order to bring some real-world understanding to the conceptual links between marketing, communication and human resources, this research focused on employees at CityJet's most recently acquired Scandinavian bases.

1.2 The context of the airline industry

The airline industry is a volatile market in which competition can be a real challenge for airlines. It is an industry that is always evolving as a result of deregulation, faster planes, changes to fuel efficiency, the global fuel market, and innovation in cabin products. In order to survive in this relentlessly competitive market, airlines need to constantly adapt to the market demands and to the innovation of their competitors. It has been highlighted in the literature that from an investor's point a view, "the creation and implementation of sustainable competitive strategies is one of the key business challenges" (Babić et al, 2017, p. 144).

According to the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), a specialised agency of the United Nations, the continuous evaluation of this sector should lead to cost reduction with improved service and expanding traffic. In 2013, ICAO suggested that the airline industry would likely evolve in three distinct ways: through corporate mergers and acquisition; through divestitures, outsourcing and spin-offs; and through strategic alliances (ICAO, 2013). This prediction has indeed been borne out in Europe, where there have been multiple corporate reorganizations within the airline industry. CityJet serves as a case in point; the evolution of company has been precisely along such lines rather than straightforward corporate growth through direct customer sales.

The airline industry is often referred to by professionals as a cyclic industry due to its inconsistent financial performance through the years (Baroux, 2014). Due to this instability, the airline industry has thus been viewed by many investors as too unstable to invest in (ICAO, 2013). This has been not the case for all companies as some airlines, notably Ryanair, have managed to be highly profitable within this difficult market even during economic recession. This has really been because of targeted sales plans that trade primarily on a low-cost, no-frills

service. However, for a company such as CityJet that has always focused on the provision of high quality service to business travellers, there is a need for more diversified corporate strategy.

The adoption of an ACMI business plan, as described above, has meant that CityJet can operate sustainably within the market by using contractual arrangements to anticipate potential challenges posed by hostile competition. It is notable that CityJet's primary commercial route from Dublin to London City is understood within the industry to be one of the most competitive routes in the world (O'Halloran, 2016). However, according to some scholars, there are still some positive benefits of increased effective competition. In this regard, Whish & Bailey (2015) have pointed out that competition in the airline industry also has the benefit of promoting allocative and productive efficiency, lower prices for consumers, stimulation of innovation in order to deliver better services, and offering a greater choice within services.

1.3 Airline Management

The airline industry poses a somewhat unique challenge for managers, not least because of the dynamic nature of the market and intense reactivity to global economic situations. Whereas aspects of the essential service being delivered may be continuous over time, cultural changes globally have meant customer habits and trends have changed drastically. People are now travelling more than they ever have but this also means that operational costs are constantly rising (D'Alessandro & Kletzel, 2013). Managers must always attempt to anticipate market volatility and to adopt strategic business plans that can provide some form of security about future revenue.

There may always be unforeseen events. The global airline industry was devastated by the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in New York. The United States (US) Bureau of Transportation, in its statistical analysis of the impact on American industry, suggested that it took the airline industry a full ten years to recover from the negative impact of the attacks (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2018). In the years after the attacks, many airlines worldwide were negatively affected, reporting a reduction in activities leading to aircraft not being operated and widespread redundancies. A complete review of how business was conducted by airlines was required, with safety of passengers and employees moving to the fore (Belobaba, 2005).

Although such significant events as 9/11, the 2008 economic recession, or the disruption caused in Europe by the eruption of an Icelandic volcano in 2010 serve to highlight the vulnerability of the industry, it would be incorrect to assume that market volatility is unusual. Rather, management of an airline involves grappling with and planning for what can be assumed to be inevitable corporate insecurity. For example, first quarter data for 2018 for the US showed the net profit in the airline industry was \$1.7 billion, representing a decline of 14% compared to same period in 2017 (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2018).

Global economic and political factors have key roles to play within the industry. For example, costs are inherently linked to a fuel price dependency on global political climate and the market value of oil. Any major political instability or conflict can have an immediate financial impact on airlines around the world (Birim & Celal, 2016). Airline senior management must be able to plan in such a way that help companies to anticipate such fluctuations, whilst continuing to meet costs and deliver services.

This case study is focused on an Irish regional airline attempting to establish a new culture among employees in such a way as to maximise profitability. CityJet must be able to do so while taking cognisance of all possible external socio-political-economic factors that are not within its control. As will be outlined below, doing so requires a fully functioning and integrated management and staff team that is communicating effectively so the company can have the resilience to be able to adapt and survive alongside the vagaries of an unstable market. The relationship between airline staff and customers, this being the central concern of any marketing department, is an important aspect of how this needs to be managed. As Anderson et al. (2009) pointed out, there is an established correlation between flight delays and operational issues, and negative impacts on customer satisfaction.

1.4 Services Marketing and Management

CityJet, as a company that is solely a provider of services rather than a manufacturer of goods, may well have traditionally located its marketing activity within the field of service marketing. The academic field of service marketing developed from the understanding that the lack of definite replicability of services performed by humans means that it can be difficult to ascertain levels of customer satisfaction such as can be established for manufacturing industries (Gronroos, 1978). Variability in performance also highlights the importance of employee-

organisation fit; employees who have good role-understanding and who feel valued by the company can be assumed to have different impacts on the quality of customer experience. This necessitates the integration of perspectives from other arenas within the marketing literature, as well as human resource management.

Skalen (2009) highlighted the importance of knowing an organisation from the inside by using all data available within the company, including resources such as staff, in order to ensure that employees are customer-oriented. Although services marketing has highlighted that a company needs to link its internal organisational processes with its customer relationships, this remains a relatively new concept in marketing and an important area for new research. The usefulness of such research to the practice of marketing has also been indicated by Little and Little (2009), who outlined complex processes involved in profitability. These included the establishment of teams that work through integration of human resource management, operations management and integrated marketing communication (ensuring consistency across all touch-points in communication of the company messages to customers), so as to lead the way in excellence of service delivery.

The traditional marketing mix (McCarthy, 1964) included focus on how a company should act by ensuring to have the right product, the appropriate price, knowing where to market the product, and how to promote it. This theory was central in marketing for a long time until it was extended by Booms and Bitner (1981) to account for the explosion in the service industry. Some areas had not been adequately covered, i.e. ensuring the product is served to the right audience by conducting market research, the importance of the staff who are delivering the service, the processes companies follow to deliver the service, physical evidence that a service has been performed, and how it has been perceived within the marketplace.

The marketing mix provides a guide for integrated marketing communication and highlights the importance of focusing on staff so as to create customer satisfaction and retention (Lings, 1999). The current research fits with such assumptions about how profitability is ultimately achieved. However, as Giannakis et al. (2015) highlighted, the extant literature on the marketing mix has been insufficient in terms of its acknowledgement of the role of the actual people who are delivering the service, and giving relatively little importance to the human resource management processes essential to the effective delivery of a service. As such, the current case study is concerned with an integrated understanding of what it means to market a

service; that it is the management of employees that needs to be considered in tandem with more traditional marketing activities in order to effectively deliver and market a service, while maintaining a positive brand identity.

1.5 Internal Marketing

More than thirty years ago, Berry et al. (1976) first referred to internal marketing as the importance of making available internal products such as jobs that can be relevant to an audience that is internal to the company, i.e. employees. The aim of so doing was to fulfil organisational needs from a human resource provision perspective. Within the literature since the mid-nineteen seventies (1970's), the concept of internal marketing has evolved beyond filling of vacant positions. Pervaiz et al. (2003) set out the importance of collaboration between departments, including human resources and marketing, so as to work together to create internal marketing strategies. The implication of this is the importance for employees of grasping the company mission and values, and that employees have a key role to play in creating customer satisfaction and customer retention.

At one level, this may mean that employees believe in the product or service that they are selling or providing. It also means that for an organisation to function effectively, there is a need to be active in promoting the company values within the organisation itself. The role of senior management in this is key as management has the ability to set a tone that can resonate within an entire organisation (Wieseke et al., 2009). Within the marketing literature, the important role of different stakeholders in creating an internal marketing strategy is clear. However, many factors need to be considered, including an understanding of current methods and culture. The collaboration of the entire company needs to be sought in order to achieve the task.

Internal marketing was described by Kaplan (2017) in terms of the importance of creating a relationship between employees, colleagues and the management team. This has previously been discussed by Lloyd (2002) as all of the strategies that a company puts into place to communicate to current staff and future employees, but also to create the perception that a company could be an enjoyable place to work. The aim of this is to create an environment that will positively encourage employees to be involved within company life.

Achieving a successful internal branding campaign or internal marketing campaign is vital for a company to create connections across all levels of the internal company structures. In many ways, this appears similar to the concepts employed in understanding of emotional-level consumer-brand connection, in that a company needs to have a personality, something to which the employee can relate. The extensive work done by Jennifer Aaker in the field of brand personality has highlighted the important traits that a company should have in order to create an identity that will resonate with customers (Aaker, 1997). The current thesis rests partially on the assumption that such theories have relevance for how employees relate to a brand. If a customer can be assumed to identify with a specific brand that s/he sees as having a resonance with personal values, it can be proposed that employees of a company may engage in such processes of identification with the company's brand.

1.6 Brand Management

The link between marketing and human resource management can also be viewed in terms of both activities being important contributors to brand management. In order to communicate the company values to staff, managing a brand involves ensuring that staff understand what the company does and how the brand is perceived from the customer's point of view. All brands should have a personality and mission; this needs to be defined clearly at an early stage so as to be able to transmit it to both customers and staff. Keller (1993) suggested that a brand personality is defined by human traits, thus becoming the flagship of a company. The company attributes can be valued by a consumer; it can also be deduced that a brand personality will also have to resonate with the employees.

Within the literature, it often seems that the major focus in marketing is on consumers' perspectives, with less emphasis on the impact that employees have on the customer's journey. It can be proposed that what is valid for customers may also hold for employees. The processes followed to convince consumers to purchase a product or avail of a service also have application for supporting the staff who will be selling that product or performing that service. Aaker's (1997) five important characteristics of brand identity (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness) may well have relevance in understanding for internal marketing also.

1.7 Organizational Change

Within competitive environments, organizations need to be prepared to address their manner of responding to a variety of extra-organizational factors. The airline industry is, as explained above, well known for the challenges it poses for companies required to continuously evolve, such as was required during the 2008 recession that globally impacted airlines (Franke & John, 2011). This demands flexibility in corporate strategy, including the ability to implement widescale organizational change to adapt the company to the change-demands of the market.

Organizational change was explicated by Huber and colleagues (1993) as including changes to all of the facets of a company's operation, particularly management, company objectives, and task distribution amongst all employees. The process of organizational change has been described by various authors as being either local, continuous, evolutionary or routine-driven (Porras and Silvers, 1991). In the current case study, CityJet can be understood to be following an evolutionary process of organizational change, because of the growth of the company with a radically changed business model across new bases.

In their paper on organizational change, Sune and Gibb (2015) described a case study of the specific managerial processes required to achieve dynamic organizational change. They cite Helfat and Peteraf (2007) in outlining how the implementation of those processes necessitates a radical modification of the operational culture within an organization from root-level. Sune and Gibb's case study is of a regional European airline, Spanair, which is no longer trading. Using a similar arrangement to that which existed between Air France and CityJet after CityJet became independent, Spanair was owned and operated on behalf of SAS. It was highlighted by Sune and Gibb (2015) that Spanair had been struggling at the time of their analysis of the business. The company needed to renew itself from an internal operational perspective, following poor financial results between 2007 and 2012. The findings from the study highlighted that Spanair needed to develop capabilities on two simultaneously operating levels, purposeful change and pattern of action, the former comprising adding, transferring, integrating and shedding, and the latter being goal-driven changes to managerial methods used to promote growth. In a nutshell, this required a review of company goals in a very fine-grained manner so as to entirely redefine the purpose of the organization, and to dissect all processes at every level within the company, internally and externally.

The case study offered by Sune and Gibb (2015) has implications for understanding both the context and demands within which CityJet operates, as well as setting out possible processes for CityJet to follow. Spanair was not successful in its endeavours to remain financially viable. Sune and Gibb's (2015) case study appears to identify that a difficulty with Spanair's organizational change lay not in the comprehensiveness of the change implemented, but rather in a failure to adequately test the solidity of the new foundations it was laying before proceeding with its new structure. Of particular interest to the current case study, change across both processual levels was said to necessitate regular reviews of the situation to ensure that useful progress was being made.

1.8 Human Resource Management

The essence of the airline industry is people; passengers and staff. Companies have to manage large numbers of staff who perform quite different functions that are importantly interlinked. As such, effective human resource management is central to organizational functioning. However, the manner in which this has been implemented may change according to the demands at particular times. For instance, Boyd (2001) wrote about how in 1980, there was a worldwide increase in hostile competition among airlines seeking to capitalise on increased demand for travel from consumers. This meant that at that time there was difficulty for airlines in recruiting and retaining staff, which became a major focus for human resource managers across airlines.

From the Human Resources (HR) literature on companies generally, studies that highlight that there is an association between the use of particular HR methods and company performance (cf. Combs et al., 2006), have implications for the current case study. Huselid (1995) described how companies who invest in their employees are likely see results in employee performance. In this regard, the role of an adequate HR system can shape positive relationships with employees and thus help to promote financial growth, employee wellbeing, and the feeling of belongingness towards the company (Batt, 2002). It is of note the current research was conducted in the context of such aims set by CityJet management.

Developing an effective internal marketing strategy necessitates the involvement of several departments within a company. In particular, human resources departments can help to promote new concepts and company structures to employees. Different human resources strategies can

be utilised, including improving employee skills so as to improve production but also ensuring that everyone within the organisation is committed to create or exceed customer satisfaction, which Mohammad (2017) refers to as 'lean production'.

With regard to this thesis, such an idea has importance for how the HR department in CityJet can implement changes to company structures. Integrating employees at multiple European locations with different labour laws is a challenge that requires HR to play a role in delivering the new values and company mission. Working as a team is a central factor for any organisation as it can help overcome difficult issues and promote employee creativity (Binyamin & Carneli, 2016). The team can be the flagbearer to promote new methods and implement new actions. High commitment from a strategic HR system can help delivering performance because it can have a beneficial effect on employee morale, which can lead to better work conditions (Kehoe & Collins, 2017).

The development of effective working relationships is a reciprocal process between management and employees. Carroll (2006, cited in Mishra et al, 2014) discusses how a company that is acting ethically shows knowledge of how to look after its employees. Such a company should build a trusting atmosphere with strong communication processes, but more importantly instil a climate of respect between employees and managers, in which employees feel heard, cared for, and supported, so that honest feedback can be given. Mishra et al (2014) suggests that internal communication is characterised by more truth and honesty when it comes directly to employees from their hierarchic superiors.

1.9 Marketing and Human Resource Management

In a study that investigated the important role of trust towards employees from managers, Erkeman and Esen (2012) emphasised the connection between corporate reputation practices among employees and customers. Focusing on the airline industry, they discussed concepts of reputation and social responsibility, proposing that this is significant in terms of how all those who have direct or indirect contact with a company, including customers, investors, and staff, have a perception of how good the company is. Within organizations, it is often HR departments who were tasked with maintaining good employee relations. However, there can be an important role for the marketing department in this regard.

A conceptual approach that redefined the role of marketers within a company and the action of integrating HR functions into the discipline of marketing was discussed by Giannakis et al (2015). In this regard, the authors explained the importance of considering the role of employees with the customers. It is primarily front-line employees who are in contact with the customers and it is they who are really the ones are creating relationships. Gianakis et al (2015) highlighted that customers will likely remember most an interaction with an employee who has delivered a good service. In this light, marketing is not only the link between the customer and a product or service but also the link between the company and its employees.

The eternal debate in marketing centres on how to know which is more important; the relationship with the customer or the provision of a service (Gummerson and Gronoos, 2012). The approach advocated by Giannakis et al. (2015) suggests that it is clear that the relationship between your employees and your customers should be a primary focus of marketing activity. A company needs to ensure that service provision is of a high quality but doing so also entails managing employee-customer interactions, this being something which can be implemented directly as part of an internal and external marketing strategy. This can be done by marketing departments, rather than employee relations aspects being assumed to belong within the company's HR functions.

Among the core concerns of marketers is not just the attraction of new business but the retention of existing customers. Herstein and Zvillig (2010) provided a case study of the process of customer retention and growth in the Israeli banking industry, highlighting the role of employees. A description was offered of the implementation of a new corporate identity. The authors outline how, during that process, the change in perception of the company by customers, and the encouragement of customer loyalty could be achieved by placing the employees at the centre of the process. The success of the strategy, which also grew the customer base by 300,000 within three years, pointed to the importance of creating strong relationships between employees and customers as being at the centre of a marketing plan. This led to the identification of an effective marketing strategy as including training for employees in how they interacted with customers, so as to communicate the new company identity on a face-to-face level.

This strategy has also been referred to by others as the creation of 'brand champions' among employees who have direct contact with consumers. In writing about this, Du Preez and

Bendixen (2015) emphasised that very little research has been conducted to link internal branding and employee relations and that, in practice, many companies do not even explain the concept of the brand and the company values to employees. They suggested that employees need to be seen as brand advocates who are best placed to create a difference in the customer's mind. In effect, this means that every company should implement an appropriate internal branding strategy. It is proposed as having an impact on company loyalty, staff retention, and job satisfaction, and thereby having a knock-on effect on how employees will give their best to delivering customer satisfaction and retaining customers.

Indeed, employee-customer interaction and collaboration can be seen as that which produces a service (Gremier and Gwinner, 2000). In this regard, an employee's positive sense of the company can be seen as crucial in the customer experiencing the service they have been offered as having been of high quality. To a large degree, this relationship operates on an emotional level, but is also influenceable in terms of how employees can be helped to follow the process that has been transmitted by the company via its managers. The trust that is placed in a well-functioning hierarchy and following a process of teaching and supervision can ultimately be seen as having a positive impact for the overall organization (Groth et al., 2009). A positive employee-customer relationship can obviously affect customer satisfaction, providing growth opportunities for the business while also maintaining a positive reputation for the company (Sergeant and Frenkel, 2000).

Employee well-being is another aspect of organizational functioning that is generally seen as having relevance primarily to HR departments. However, this too can be seen as an important concern for marketers who have the opportunity to work so as influence the internal company processes, as illustrated by the following quote:

“Accordingly, all factors that affect employee wellness, employee happiness, employee commitment and employee satisfaction end up with customer loyalty and satisfaction” Erkemen and Esen (2012, p.283)

The maintenance of good company reputation necessitates that internal employee relations mechanisms are focused on ensuring that there is a sense of trust existing within the company. This means the sharing of the concern for employee wellbeing exists across company departments. It is of note that Yang (2007) showed a positive correlation between commitment

satisfaction for employees and company reputation. Marketing professionals should thus not be concerned only with external communication. Indeed, their skills at external communication often makes them the best placed members of an organization to develop proper internal communication structures within a company. This can be achieved by interacting with the employee in very similar ways to how marketers interact with customers. Ultimately, employee engagement can be successful if marketing professionals can help with creating an atmosphere of trust among all employees within an organisation (Mishra et al., 2014).

1.10 Company Identity, Internal Marketing, and Culture

Moving beyond the leading concern with the customer relationship within the marketing literature, Bhattacharya and Sankar (2003) noted that another dimension has become that of marketers focusing on doing whatever they can do to retain customers. It is of note that, although the conceptual link between such activity and internal marketing/employee relations has already been established in the current literature review, the fact remains that literature searches fail to yield adequate peer reviewed studies that empirically establish the link. Another way in which to approach this issue conceptually can be found within the literature on company identity.

Company identity can in part be constituted as consumer knowledge structures about the company, i.e. what consumers know about a company can be seen as comprising corporate image or corporate reputation, or in a more general sense, corporate associations (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Fromburn & Shanley, 1990, both cited in Bhattacharya and Sankar, 2003). However, it can be proposed that company identity could be better understood as existing within a broader company culture that includes a sense of customers' identification with the company, but also the operational culture within the organization itself, and employee experiences.

As explained in the previous chapter, the challenge facing CityJet as it attempts to develop a new business model is very much concerned with company culture. This is particularly the case because not only does CityJet need to understand its own existing culture but also how this is likely to be changed as it comes into contact with the cultures of the organizations it has amalgamated into its own. Such a process crucially requires effective internal communication in order to be successful. It is of note in this regard that the HR literature identifies workplace

diversity as one of the most important challenges for a HR organization, though the same literature has tended to define the workforce as a generic and homogeneous rubric, completely removing from the equation the cultural differences among employees. (Alcazar et al., 2013; Benschop, 2001).

Whereas the requirement for cross cultural workforces has become more and more present for companies (Cook & Glass, 2009; Seyman, 2006), the HR literature has tended not to provide much detail on how the process of integrating that workforce within an over-arching company identity and culture might be achieved. Indeed, it has been observed that managing a multi-cultural workforce can mean changes to all implemented HR strategies (Shen et al., 2009; Bleijenbergh et al., 2010; Tatli, 2011). There appears to have been little development in this regard to date, such that there still appears to be relevance to Alcazar et al.'s (2013) observations that there was a lack of a universal approach but only indications of isolated best practice without mention of contextual influences. Most organizations may not pay active attention to cultural differences among employees. If not tackled efficiently through internal communication, this may create problems for the organization.

1.11 Internal Communication

Internal communication strategies are one of the principal mechanisms through which marketers can seek to effect change and cohesion within an organization, most helpfully working alongside the HR department. The absence of such strategies or, indeed, the presence of ineffective strategies can lead to organizational crisis. Zaumane (2016) outlined the potentially damaging effect on the reputation of a brand if the internal communication process are not properly in place. Internal problems, she writes, can include unpowerful leadership, no culture of organization, unobvious company values, and no communication processes. She cites Gruning (1992) in setting out how preventing such eventualities requires the implementation of symmetrical systems, i.e. putting in place dialogue programmes between the employees and managers to ensure and promote communication.

The importance for an organization to establish values for employees and make clear their roles within the organization, as well the importance of all employees understanding the tasks that everyone else has to do was discussed by Pohlman et al. (2000). They outlined how employees working for companies are bringing their own values to their work, which may or may not fit

with the company values. Getting to know employees and what it is that they bring to their work is an important strategy for a company in understanding how the management can work in partnership with employees. Managers have an essential role to play in setting the tone of reciprocal internal communication processes by first instilling company values that can resonate with the entire organisation.

The literature on internal communication offers little that directly discusses internal communication in the airline industry. However, of some relevance is a paper from Chong (2007) that presented a case study on Singapore Airlines. The case study focused on the impact of using appropriate training and internal communication to provide the best service for its clientele. An important finding from Chong's work was that the company found value in realising the power that cabin crew have to connect with passengers as the representatives of the brand. This meant that internal communication could usefully focus on ensuring staff understood company values that could be shared directly with the consumer.

Ultimately, the focus of Chong's (2007) paper was on the implementation of an internal communication strategy to enhance profitability through training of staff to provide a better quality service for the passengers. Interestingly, for a company with a presumably highly diverse workforce, there was little mention of the cultural processes and differences among staff at Singapore Airlines, and what this could mean in terms of the implementation of an internal communication strategy. The current case study focuses on exactly those processes of connecting employees with different cultural backgrounds with a new company identity, and how to create a brand identity with which employees from all CityJet European bases can feel connected.

It is intended that this will develop a more complex understanding of internal communication within an airline than that which was offered by Chong (2007). That said, there is much value in what Chong stated as an underpinning principle for the conduction of this research:

“It shows that internal communication and training should be treated as the ‘first frontier’ in the battle for the customer: when it is founded on strong corporate values, into ‘walking embodiments’ of the core values, and key touch points into opportunities for fulfilling the brand promise” Chong, (2007, p201).

Chapter 2: Background to the Case Study

2.1 Introduction to the subject of the case study

The rationale for conducting this research needs to be understood in the context of CityJet's historical business models, and evolving structures and business plans. Since the airline was founded by Pat Byrne in 1993, it has progressed through a number of transformations in its corporate strategy. At the time of its establishment, CityJet began operating services between Dublin Airport and London City Airport, which provided unique access for business customers to the heart of the financial centre of London City. It soon began expanding by operating flights on behalf of Virgin Airlines and later entered a partnership with Air France, before formally becoming a subsidiary of Air France.

In 2013, the company became independent from Air France, when it was bought by German company Intro Aviation. CityJet then underwent a phase of instability, associated with increased competitive activity on its key routes, and financial challenges which led to redundancies. At that point the future of the company was uncertain. In 2015, a further change of ownership was completed when a business consortium led by Pat Byrne purchased the airline. The company then began embarking on a major programme of expansion and strategic development. It began by developing its own network with a codeshare agreement with Air France. A code share agreement is when two airlines operate in partnership to sell seats on the same flight.

The initial stages of setting itself up once more as an independent airline required a major rebranding project. Once this had been successfully completed by 2015, the challenge facing CityJet was to open more routes under its own name, using its own airline identifying code, and to assume full financial responsibility for its scheduled routes. The partnership with Air France was continued to some degree but management of the route was fundamentally different, in that CityJet was responsible for providing the aircraft, crew, maintenance, and insurance, whereas Air France continued to operate the commercial aspects of the route. This structure is referred in the industry as ACMI (Aircraft, Crew, Maintenance, and Insurance) or 'wet lease'.

In order to stay competitive within the marketplace, the company had to review its assets. With ever-changing technological standards in the industry, the primary aircraft type that CityJet

was operating was considered to be in need of upgrading. During the summer of 2015, CityJet embarked on the dual projects of beginning the replacement process for its fleet in tandem with a Request For Proposal (RFP) tender process to operate routes under contract for SAS (Scandinavian Airlines) in Scandinavia. By 2016, this had proved to be a successful venture, which created more than 150 new CityJet jobs in the Nordic region. To use the airline industry terminology, at that time CityJet passed command of a fleet of eight Bombardier CRJ900s with option for six more to service the SAS contract; this fleet has since expanded further.

In order to develop its capacity to operate the SAS contract, CityJet also acquired the Scandinavian airline Blue1, retaining the majority of its workforce to act as the nucleus of the company's new Nordic operation. The purchase of Blue1 has allowed CityJet to begin its Nordic expansion strategy at its newly acquired base in Helsinki. A pre-existing relationship between SAS and Blue1 has been beneficial for CityJet as it provided access to significant operational structure within the Scandinavian market.

The integration of Blue1 staff into CityJet was a major project that had to be completed with sensitivity, this being the subject of the current case study. Recruitment for further staff, in particular flight deck and cabin crew, was a major undertaking. That said, despite only being awarded the SAS contract at the end of September 2015, the first flight on behalf of SAS using a newly built CRJ900, ordered in October 2015, took off in March 2016. The company has continued to expand since then. In November 2016, a further contract was developed with Brussels Airlines to operate routes on its behalf. The agreement with SAS has also grown, with CityJet securing a 50% increase in the existing contract to operate twelve aircraft for SAS.

2.2 CityJet Business Model

The model of service delivery, known within the airline industry as ACMI, or 'wet lease', has increasingly become core to CityJet's new business plan and has provided for very effective management of financial risk. Although the business has largely shifted to focus on such wet lease operations, CityJet has also sought to maintain activity within its scheduled services from its base at London City Airport. However, as the author of the current study has been aware, competition between airlines operating routes between Dublin and London has been at times quite hostile and aggressive within the marketplace. CityJet has had to be clever in order to survive through diversifying its activity. The ACMI operations have become more central but

it has also continued to be important to have a commercial route that could serve as a window to showcase the excellent services that the airline can provide for other airlines through wet lease agreements.

2.3 Chairman's vision for the company

Referring to the classical marketing literature, Zahra (2003) wrote about how Drucker (1954) had held that for the prosperity of an organisation, the performances and qualities of managers are essential for its survival and that managers are the key elements to drive success across the entire organisation. The company mission is also an area that needs to be guided by leadership to ensure employees' productivity and innovation. As noted above, CityJet was in a precarious position in 2014 and 2015. In February 2015, Pat Byrne, CityJet's founder, returned as chairman of the company board and restructured the senior management team to take control of the airline.

Pat Byrne had a vision for CityJet to develop significantly the wet lease/ACMI business plans, alongside ongoing scheduled routes. This allows for security in revenue streams for the airline. Alongside this, the vision included the continued development of a dedicated and motivated staff, who could focus on the customer in achieving this goal. In the marketing model outlined by Slater and Narver (1994), CityJet could be best described in this regard as a company that is market-orientated. This means that its culture and the ambition of its chairman is entirely and systematically dedicated to deliver and exceed customer satisfaction.

2.4 Rapid Company Expansion

At the time of its purchase by its current owners in 2015, CityJet had approximately 500 staff, based primarily in mainland Europe with headquarters in Dublin. By 2018, this had grown to more than 2,200 employees at nine crew bases in Amsterdam, Brussels, Copenhagen, Dublin, Helsinki, London, Paris, Stockholm, Tallinn and most recently Vilnius. The airline now has a widespread network that is evidence of its growth and sustainability. Such rapid expansion meant that the company had to review all its organisation structures and to pay attention to how the new company culture has been developing. A greater number of geographical locations has meant that the company has been faced with issues that it did not encounter before.

An important example is the launching of the SAS contract. The contract required the establishment of bases in the Nordic region, with due regard to local employment regulations, collective labour agreements and working practices. Although the company already had a French base and therefore had experience of crew bases in different jurisdictions, establishing two bases in Finland and Sweden in a relatively short period of time, including major recruitment and training programmes, was a significant undertaking. Ensuring all crews were fully briefed and able to deliver an ACMI service on behalf of partner airlines with which it developed a contract became a major priority for CityJet.

2.5 Company context for the current study

The recent expansion of the company and the change of its business plan to an almost exclusive focus on providing ACMI services for other airlines has meant a root-to-branch change of identity for the CityJet brand. This major change also required the recruitment of new staff across Europe to carry out the colossal work that the company had in its new company vision. When the CityJet purchased Blue1 in 2015, it was the first time that the company bought an airline that wasn't based in mainland Europe, a development that brought the company very particular challenges.

Two years after the acquisition of Blue1, the senior management team of CityJet wished to assess how the recently integrated companies were now operating as the CityJet brand at the Scandinavian bases. Through internal discussion and review of the human resources and operational performance statistics, senior management were aware that the staff in those regions did not seem to be connecting to the company identity and were operating different practices to those staff at other European bases. In order to develop a greater understanding of what might be happening, the management team tasked the marketing department with an internal communication project. It is that project that is the focus of the case study.

As explained in Chapter 1, there is an important conceptual and practical link that can be established between the processes of internal marketing, human resources management, and integrated marketing of products or services that are sold profitably to customers. The challenge for CityJet now is to integrate those processes so as to communicate the company mission to the newly acquired bases and to develop a sense of identity among employees with regard to CityJet's particular market orientation. This case study reports findings from the pilot

internal communication project. It is anticipated that this will be used to plan and rebuild company identity and internal communication processes, with which employees across all bases may find they are able to connect.

2.6 Aims of the Research

The following chapters outline how an internal communication strategy was implemented at CityJet's regional bases in Scandinavia. The findings illustrate what could be learned from employees through direct engagement with them during the piloting of that strategy. The research was carried out by CityJet's marketing team, which was considered appropriate, and even essential, activity for the team, as has been outlined in Chapter 1. The following chapters present details on the conduction of the research and the findings, and discuss the potential implications of the internal communication process for CityJet as an evolving company.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Questions

3.1 Research Design

This research made use of a case study design, in which qualitative data from participants was collected and synthesised from three research sites at different bases within the same company in order to bring understanding to a complex organisational process as it has been experienced by employees.

3.2 Research Questions

The following research questions are proposed in order to guide the overall subject of investigation, which is the association between internal marketing and employee experiences of a brand, such as this may ultimately impact on service delivery.

- 3.2.1 How do employees at newly acquired CityJet European bases experience the CityJet brand?
- 3.2.2 What are the differences and similarities between this and the experiences of employees at existing long-term bases?
- 3.2.3 How do employees at newly acquired CityJet bases experience their identity as CityJet employees?
- 3.2.4 What are the processes already in place promoting positive brand identity? Are these processes working effectively? What can be learned about how to develop this area of internal marketing?
- 3.2.5 How do employees identify themselves with the brand? Are they agreeing with the company values?
- 3.2.6 How do employees experience the connection, if any, between their sense of brand identity and their commitment to the tasks associated with their employee roles?
- 3.2.7 What link, if any, do employees identify between employee well-being and job performance?
- 3.2.8 What steps can be identified for management in responding to emerging difficulties about internal brand identity?

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter provides details on how participants were recruited and interviewed, and how the data was captured and stored. Details are provided with regard to the composition of the research team and how the processes of data collection and analysis were conducted. Some reflections are offered with regard to potential bias that was anticipated and addressed throughout the research process.

4.2 Participant sampling

Across all European bases, CityJet has more than 2,200 employees. The different bases were established at different points in time, meaning that there are different levels of operational and knowledge-related integration within the overall company. The most recently acquired bases are those in Scandinavia and countries in the Baltic region. These are also the bases identified by the senior management team as being most in need of assessment and support. In order to address this need and to make the research project achievable in the context of a taught master's programme, the research focused on three company bases in Copenhagen, Helsinki and Stockholm. There were approximately 150 staff across these three bases who could potentially have been research participants.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling (Lavrakas, 2008), in which local managers were asked to identify employees who were available because of being on-shift on the identified research dates and who were willing to participate in the research. Purposive sampling was used in order to identify participants who were in a position to meaningfully address the research questions, rather than establish the frequency of responses or any particular correlation between variables. This was important because of the exploratory nature of the research.

Due to the nature of the aviation industry, not all staff were available to attend focus group sessions. Those staff that were available were informed of the focus group by its appearance on their roster a month in advance. In addition, an email was sent to the invited employees, outlining the research and stressing the voluntary nature of participation in the focus group. The table below sets out the participants who ultimately took part in focus groups. Please note that demographic information is not presented in detail because of the possible identifiability of employees within the company.

In total, ten focus groups were conducted across three bases between year-end 2017 and mid-2018, each consisting of between eight and thirty participants. A total of 90 participants attended the focus groups, with a roughly even gender split. Approximately half of the participants were pilots and the remainder were cabin crew, with the exception of one participant who was a member of office staff.

Table 4.1 Focus Group Participants

	Location	Total Participants	Female Staff	Male Staff	Pilots	Cabin Crew	Other Staff
Focus Group 1	Helsinki	8	5	3	3	4	1
Focus Group 2	Helsinki	13	7	6	7	6	n/a
Focus Group 3	Helsinki	8	3	5	3	5	n/a
Focus Group 4	Helsinki	10	2	8	8	2	n/a
Focus Group 5	Copenhagen	9	6	3	3	6	n/a
Focus Group 6	Copenhagen	8	5	3	3	5	n/a
Focus Group 7	Copenhagen	8	8	n/a	2	6	n/a
Focus Group 8	Stockholm	8	3	5	5	3	n/a
Focus Group 9	Stockholm	10	6	4	7	3	n/a
Focus Group 10	Stockholm	8	3	5	5	3	n/a
Total		90	48	42	46	43	1

4.3 Data collection

The primary data were obtained from ten focus groups, the purpose of which was to gather opinions with the aim of understanding how people feel and react about the company in question. While also being a mainstay of traditional market research, Krueger and Casey (2015) have highlighted how focus group methods are often useful for engaging with employees, as human resources processes are often implemented at too early a stage before first directly engaging with employees to grasp the underlying culture, language and working environment.

At a focus group, the facilitator creates a safe environment, whereby participants, in this case employees, are encouraged to share their opinions. Discussion groups can be held with different participants who have important similarities, e.g. being employees within the same

industry. The conduction of multiple groups allows the researcher to identify trends and similarities in opinions. Analyses can then be conducted comparing data from across groups. Krueger and Casey (2015) have suggested that at least three groups are required for meaningful findings to be produced.

For the current research, data was collected during the ten focus groups by a research team led by the marketing manager, assisted by two junior members of the marketing team and a senior cabin crew manager. The lead researcher was responsible for the collation and analysis of the data and briefing all research assistants on the nature of each focus group. The inclusion of other staff from the airline within the research team was felt to be important because of the necessary industry-specific knowledge required to make sense of participants' experiences during the focus groups.

The focus groups were each led by three members of the research team, with members alternating roles, while working closely with the briefing that had been set out in advance by the lead researcher. The initial three focus groups were led by the lead researcher, who provided clear example for the research team of the manner in which the groups should be conducted, as well as the questions that were to be asked. These questions were re-developed after each group and formed the briefing that was provided by the lead researcher prior to the subsequent group. For any groups at which the lead researcher was not the lead facilitator, she was immediately contacted after the focus group by the research team to debrief and begin the process of preparing the next group.

One researcher asked the questions and facilitated the group, while two others took extensive contemporaneous notes. All notes were created in an anonymised manner, with no identifiable employee information. Afterwards, the opportunity to provide anonymous written feedback was also given. This was in the form of a blank sheet of paper, a pen and a sealed envelope. Every participant in the focus group provided some form of comment in the sealed envelopes.

4.4 Procedure

The company headquarters office was used in Helsinki. In Copenhagen and Stockholm, a hotel conference room was used. The layout of the room was consistent across each focus group meeting. A U-shaped layout was used for chairs and tables. Each focus group lasted

approximately two hours. Refreshments were provided throughout the meeting. The first twenty minutes of each group meeting consisted of a presentation from the marketing team, providing an update of new developments within the company, as well an orientation to company values and an explanation of the need to collect information from new staff. This presentation was mandatory for all selected employees to attend as part of their core duties.

Identified participants were then reminded of the voluntary nature of the focus group that took place after the information session. They were asked to confirm their consent to participate and reminded that they could withdraw from the group at any time, if they so wished. All participants except for one completed the focus groups in their entirety. The one employee who withdrew did so because of being called to duty unexpectedly. Participants were also informed that any information they provided would not have any bearing on their terms and conditions and/or status as employees of the company. They were also informed that the individual source of any information presented in this thesis or made available subsequently to senior management would not be identifiable. Anonymisation was ensured by collecting data from the groups without identifying the names of the participants or their positions within the organisation alongside the data record.

A series of open questions were provided to the focus groups, making use of an interview guide in order to support a semi-structured interaction in which employees were provided with the opportunity to describe their experiences within the company as well introduce any new information that had not been previously considered. All participants were given an opportunity to speak during the meeting. Due to the fact that this research was being conducted internally within an organisation, and because of the lead researcher also being a manager within the organisation, it was strongly felt that the assurance of anonymity was crucial to effective engagement with participants. As such, the decision was made not to audio-record any of the focus groups.

A debriefing session between the researchers took place immediately after each focus group. During this debriefing, the researchers exchanged notes and discussed the features of the session. A written synopsis was created prior to the debriefing sessions ending. All data were immediately organised and secured. All documents involved with each focus group were filed and placed in a secure folder and carried back by a member of the research team to the company headquarters in Dublin. Only the researchers involved in this study had access to the raw data.

It was not shared with senior management personnel. Feedback was offered to the senior management team in Dublin throughout this process but consisted solely of impressions held by the researchers as to whether there might be a particular need for support of staff or direct action at particular bases.

4.5 Data Analysis

A qualitative approach was taken to this study because it allows for more flexibility, rather than reliance on the manipulation of predetermined categories used in experimental and quantitative research (Walle, 2015). The involvement of multiple stakeholders in a case study of an airline means that the researcher will have an important role in ensuring that the requirements of company management are addressed, while ensuring the perspectives of employees are accurately represented. This means that an approach that is both interpretative and phenomenological will be most useful.

The usefulness of qualitative research is to recognise that there are social phenomena that need to be addressed with regard to the meaning of the parties involved (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2015) and that the focus of the researcher will be that of centralising the human experience. However, a frequently identified limitation of qualitative research is the lack of generalisability. In the cross-cultural context of this particular case study, it may be hard to generalise findings from one location to another, even within the same company. That said, there is an important opportunity to inform the company about the complexity and provide guidance about how to respond to varied findings.

The data analytic procedures followed were those set out by Wilkinson (2008) and by Kreuger and Casey (2015) specifically for the analysis of focus group data. The coding task began following the first focus group, as the research team met to review and discuss the records of the group and discussed themes that were emerging from the data in light of each research question. The notes taken by the research team were then codified and analysed. Following the recommendations of Kreuger and Casey (2015), the team made use of the grounded theory methods set out by Glaser and Strauss (1967), further developed by Charmaz (2014).

The lead researcher then prioritized certain themes after the data had been categorized. Using a continuous comparative strategy allowed the development of a template for the different themes. Working with the research team, the lead researcher discussed the frequency of

reported information, the emotional content of the statements and how participants were reacting to others' statements. This discussion took place immediately after the conclusion of each focus group in order to ensure it was fresh in each of the team member's memories.

The researchers began analysis following the first focus group. At that point, in order to guide the developing interview strategy for further groups, the data were organised under content-focused headings that related to emerging patterns within the data (Charmaz, 2014). This facilitated the researchers in ensuring that all aspects of employees' work-related experiences could be captured in future focus groups. The interview schedule was amended and developed accordingly following each subsequent group that was conducted. Analysis of the data was continually organised under content headings for the sake of clarity and assisting the researchers with managing a large amount of data.

The total dataset was developed and added to after each focus group so that it was more easily available for analysis. After each focus group the data were analysed by the lead researcher, who consulted with all members of the research team who first reviewed their notes and shared their impressions, which were integrated by the lead researcher into her own developing dataset. This process was repeated for each focus group to compare the findings from each focus group to each subsequent group until all ten focus groups have been completed. All of the data were then compared to identify emergent themes.

The next step was to gather all data collected together within a Microsoft Word document. Coding was conducted within Microsoft Word by the lead researcher, through developing initial themes and building these into substantive codes. The substantive codes were then grouped together according to themes, from which the final theme were developed. The themes were reorganised numerous times using an Microsoft Excel spreadsheet in order to ensure best fit with the data before settling on the final themes presented in Chapter 5.

4.6 Consideration of alternative methods

The nature of this study is such that it was not amenable to quantitative research methods. However, other forms of qualitative research methods were considered. A qualitative survey was explored as an option but was judged not to be suitable because of the possibility that survey questions can be oriented toward biases, can be misleading, less open, and impersonal (Kreuger & Casey, 2015). Additionally, the experience of conducting surveys within the

organisation in the past was that there was always a high rate of non-completion, often because employees do not have access to email while they are flying. It was thus felt important to use a direct method of communication with employees in order to understand more about actual experiences, and feelings towards the company and company identity.

The conduction of individual interviews with employees was also explored as an option but it was felt not to be feasible due to the large numbers of staff throughout several departments and locations, as well as the limited time frame available to conduct the study. Focus groups were thus considered to be the best means of obtaining the required data due to the advantage of providing insight into a variety of company issues such as staff morale, perception of communication from the employer, productivity and how the employees feel about the company (Kreuger & Casey, 2015). It was also felt that there was an added advantage of the employees feeling that they were being listened to by the company.

4.7 Ethical considerations

It was possible that there could have been information discussed during focus groups that employees might have found difficult or stressful to talk about. All participants were reminded of the voluntary and confidential nature of the interviews and that they had the opportunity to end their participation at any time. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw any information they have provided at any stage until the completion of the research. All care was taken not to cause any distress to any participant. As such, groups were focused on factual reporting and were not targeted directly toward emotional matters. In the event that an employee was to have become upset during or after a focus group, he/she would have been informed of the support available through the company Occupational Health service and advised of standard company complaints procedures. This, in fact, did not occur but all participants were made aware of such supports.

While care was taken by the lead researcher to maintain as neutral a position as possible in conducting interviews, it is to be acknowledged that the lead researcher is herself an employee of CityJet and has close working relationships with the senior management team. As such, it is possible that some participants may have viewed the researcher as a representative of senior management. Where it was anticipated that such a situation might have caused a difficulty, the lead researcher was be assisted by junior members of the marketing team in order to obtain

feedback from particular employees, though the lead researcher remained in a supervisory research role throughout.

Finally, it is possible that participants who had particular grievances or concerns about the company or particular managers could have seen the research as an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction. While no attempt was made to silence any participants, care was taken to remind them that the research was not a formal complaints or disciplinary process and that information would not be shared about the employee with HR or any other part of the company management. This was with the exception of any participant communicating information that might indicate that the safety of any individual or company asset might be compromised, or that any serious misconduct or criminal behaviour had taken place. Participants were made aware of this fact prior to the commencement of focus groups. There was no such actual instance occurring during the ten groups.

4.8 Limitations and Credibility of the Findings

The credibility of the findings was ensured by incorporating the recommendations set out by Yardley (2008), Kreuger and Casey (2015), by Schwandt and Gates (2018). The following section refers to aspects drawn from both references. Qualitative research was understood by the researcher in this instance as scientific research that aims to discover cause and effect but looks more specifically at relationships, predictability, or even to look for the essential nature of phenomena.

Although the context of the particular research is unique, it still remains important that the research can be replicable. As far as possible, this can be achieved through clear specification of the research procedure within this dissertation. However, it is to be acknowledged that there is some element of the research that cannot be controlled by the researcher, such as the unpredictable dynamics within each focus group as they were being conducted.

It is of note that the credibility of findings could be questioned in terms of researcher neutrality. In this regard it is acknowledged that the research team were employees of the company within which the research was conducted. However, steps were taken to ensure that the researchers were not unduly influenced by their own experiences as company employees. In particular, none of the research team had direct contact with or have had any operational engagement with any of the focus group members. The participants in the groups were almost entirely cabin

crews and pilots. The research team were all based in the marketing department and had not worked previously in internal communication outside of head office in Dublin.

In order to ensure that the data reported were, as much as possible, accurate reflections of what took place during each focus group, the research team met to follow the processes of joint reflection as described above. After each focus group the lead researcher ensured that a systematic analytic procedure was followed, and they consulted with the members of the team so as to achieve consensus regarding the identifiable patterns in the data. This meant that the findings can more reliably be said to be credible reflections of employee experiences than if the research was conducted by the lead researcher in isolation.

The lead researcher's view was that capturing spontaneous data that were relevant to each actual focus group was important and meaningful, and that this meaningfulness was not reduced by the variability and unsystematic nature of engaging with participants within ten different groups at three different locations. Further quality checks were carried during the later stages of analysis as it was reviewed numerous times by an academic colleague of the lead researcher to check the themes were true to the content of the data.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the findings drawn from analysis of data gathered from ten focus groups conducted at three Scandinavian CityJet bases, in Helsinki, Stockholm, and Copenhagen. As noted in the previous chapter, in order to protect the anonymity of staff and to ensure the credibility of analysis conducted by a researcher who is also a member of staff of the same organisation, quotations are identified only by the base at which the employees work, and not specific focus groups. The process of data analysis as outlined in section 4.4 of the previous chapter led to the identification of fifteen themes, which were organised under four superordinate themes, as follows: 1) Belonging to CityJet, 2) Knowing who we work for, 3) Different in our sameness: developing a new culture, 4) Knowing what has to be done. The organisation of the themes is shown in Table 5.1 below

Table 5.1 Organisation of Themes

Belonging to CityJet	Knowing who we Work For	Different in our Sameness: Developing A new culture	Knowing what has to be done
Connecting with Head Office	Internal communication about the company	New employees perception of CityJet's culture	Internal communication about duties
Feeling part of the team	Internal company identity	Speaking different languages: learning about local cultures	A reservoir of knowledge: how the company should learn from us
Belonging requires authentic contact	External Company Identity	Trying to speak the same language: interdepartmental communication	Safety before company identity: getting the right technical knowledge
Feeling Secure in my role	Building a new identity together		
Feeling appreciated			

5.2 Belonging to CityJet

This theme refers to employees' describing experiences of being part of an entity, the company itself. Participants from across all three Scandinavian bases spoke about a shared concern with experiencing a sense of belongingness within the company they work for. This had particular significance because all of the participants from those bases were relatively new employees of CityJet who had previously been working for airlines recently acquired by CityJet. Participants described the sense of belonging to CityJet as a complex experience that involved interactions with other staff as well as a sense of connection to the overall organisation.

5.2.1 Connecting with Head Office

This was a theme identified within the data obtained from every focus group. Each group spoke about having felt that they did not have a connection with CityJet head office for a long time since joining the company. Indeed, as illustrated by the following quote, many participants described how they did they not know who the members of senior management were:

“not knowing many people from CityJet HQ with the exception of chairman – Most are just signatures in an email” - Participant from Copenhagen

This theme also refers to the value of establishing such a connection for the participants. This was again emphasised within every focus group, as exemplified by a participant at the Helsinki base who identified the importance of *“Feeling heard in Ireland after all this time”*. Many participants suggested that the experience was somewhat bittersweet; they expressed disappointment that the connection to head office had been lacking and took so long to establish but also spoke of their great appreciation for the fact that contact was finally being made. The information workshops and focus groups were generally perceived as a meaningful first step in helping employees connect to head office, which was identified as an important aspect of feeling that they belonged to the company.

5.2.2 Feeling part of the new team

Some participants at each of the three bases spoke about how they had experienced a sense of non-belongingness to CityJet. As new staff in the organisation, they initially found it hard to identify with being members of a new CityJet team. Rather, they were feeling that they had lost a sense that they had with their previous company identity. This was expressed on several occasions as attempting to cope with a sense of loss; in a way some employees were grieving

the loss of their previous organisation and the loss of colleagues. This made a small number of participants feel somewhat alienated and unsure as to how to fit in with the new organisation. The following quote highlights how this could be experienced almost as being in a sort of limbo:

“Not feeling in between Blue1, CityJet and SAS and of not totally belonging to the ‘Irish’ company”

- Participant from Helsinki

However, those participants who identified such a sense of not feeling part of a new organisation also highlighted their desire to feel more listened-to and to experience a greater level of integration within the new company. It was of note that cabin crew (the base is not identified as noted in the methodology chapter in order to protect identity with a specific group is named) spoke how giving them a greater voice in day-to-day operational decisions and planning would be an important step in helping them to feel more a part of the organisation.

5.2.3 Belonging requires authentic contact

Some participants recognised the importance of contact with the company and highlighted how the workshop and focus group was itself a way for them to be able to feel heard. It was the particular quality of this contact with the facilitators that was felt by the participants to allow them to speak about experiences in a way they had not feel able to before. The non-directional stance of the focus group facilitators meant, for those participants, that they could express their concerns in a manner thought to be more authentic. The fact that they could say they felt listened to by the facilitators without judgement was important for them. Ultimately, this helped them to feel more connected to the organisation.

“It was good that we could finally be honest how we feel about things. It also felt that somebody was listening to our side of the story.”

- Participant from Helsinki

5.2.4 Feeling secure in my role

Some participants described having felt insecure about their future within the company because of what they perceived to be a lack of adequate information about what was happening. For example, learning by word-of-mouth about the opening of new bases in neighbouring regions meant that they worried about their own job security. The provision of information through the workshops in this research was thus experienced by the employees as comforting. Without a sense of belongingness for employees within the new company, they became anxious that they could be made redundant because they did not feel to be fully part of the company. Participants in Helsinki highlighted how this could make employees feel vulnerable when they needed to cancel duty because of illness.

5.2.5 Feeling Appreciated

Most participants spoke about their sense of feeling appreciated by the company they worked for as an important aspect of a sense of belonging to the company. This also seen has having important impacts on their personal lives and how they performed their duties. The manner in which they felt they were communicated with was greatly associated with how much they felt appreciated. For instance, if they felt they had been spoken to severely or there was a lack of compassion shown to them, it became very difficult for them to cope. At times, it was said, some crew felt that there was insufficient consideration shown to them for their time off when they were being contacted for duty, or that there insufficient goodwill shown to them when they did come to work when they were rostered to be off-duty.

“Crew called to operate on their day off, rarely will they be offered that day at some stage in the future.”

- Participant from Helsinki

However, many participants also spoke of how much it meant to them when they felt appreciated by the company. The internal communication strategy implemented as part of this research was an example identified by many participants as a sign that the company does care about them. Such experiences were explained as having a beneficial impact on motivation to complete their duties or being flexible in terms of rostered time on-duty. Some participants also highlighted that feeling appreciated was just one aspect of job satisfaction, which they felt also consisted of relationships with colleagues and experiential opportunities to learn and grow

within the new organisation. It also noted by one participant that the support from CityJet to crew who were dealing with passenger incidents was something that helped employees feel appreciated:

“[Crew member] reported rude and abusive passengers. [I] found CityJet’s response overall to be extremely helpful and supportive.”

- Participant from

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5.3 Knowing who we work for

Most participants spoke about the importance developing a sense of shared knowledge about the company itself among employees. This involved the participants learning about CityJet through the internal communication strategy itself. They represented company knowledge as being built from internal communication into a form of company self-awareness that involved knowledge about internal identity and how this manifests within a company identity communicated in employee-customer interactions. Participants saw this process as a dynamic one that involved them centrally as actors along with the direction of management, both locally and in head office. It was emphasised by participants that it is important to establish some continuous form of communication in order to underpin such a process.

5.3.1 Internal communication about the company

Across all three bases, many participants highlighted that they had a need for greater information about CityJet, particularly about the business plans and strategies. This was important for them because in the absence of sufficient knowledge it was hard for them to know where they stand as employees of the company. Although they were aware of internal communication processes, delivered via email, that had been in place since before CityJet acquired the companies they worked for, they felt that this had been insufficient to allow them to obtain the necessary understanding about the new company of which they had suddenly become part. The following quote highlighted a lack of clarity that some participants felt about what was happening in the company:

“[We] have noticed that within OCC [Operations & Crew Control], there have been a lot of changes. [We are] unsure whether this because people are leaving or if OCC is expanding.” - Participant at ???where

Participants expressed a need for more regular updates and information regarding changes in company processes and structures, including a request for guidance about company policy for employees using social media. The value of internal communication was consistently referred to by participants at the three bases when they expressed appreciation for the workshops/focus groups conducted as part of this research. The conduct of the research itself was seen as a sign that the employees felt they were taken seriously, although some questioned what might happen to the feedback they provided as part of the internal communication project.

In some instances, participants noted that they had learned information about the company from external sources. They found this dissatisfying when they had not received such details internally within CityJet, as this impacted on their ability to engage with passengers who were asking questions about specific issues. This is well demonstrated by the following quote:

“Stories appear in newspapers and there is no official feedback from CityJet management. Pilots and crew do not know what is going on.”

-Participant at ???where

5.3.2 Internal company identity

This was a theme that was represented in the discussion in all of the ten focus groups. It refers to the insecurity and uncertainty staff experience about the company itself and their own identity as employees. It was emphasised by participants that knowing more detail about the company they worked for helped them to identify with CityJet as a brand, particularly in the context of the company expanding. At present, many participants felt that it was unclear what kind of company CityJet is, even wondering about the company's nationality. Ongoing changes in the makeup of the company staff were associated by the participants with a sense that the company identity was also continually changing.

The difficulty in identifying with CityJet for participants was also explained in light of past experiences with changes in ownership of the companies they had worked for. Having been used to a lack of a sense of permanence in the identity of the companies they worked for meant that some employees found it difficult to integrate the feeling that they were part of a CityJet community. Some also noted that they continued to identify more with their previous

companies, as they felt that their roles were closely linked with their experience of their previous employer than currently with CityJet.

“[We] believe that CityJet are just a phase and that [we] do not belong. We have been here before with other owners.”

- Participant at ??

Again, the workshops/focus groups were received as impacting positively for participants; in this case it helped them to identify more with the company and to feel that the process of engaging with the research could be the beginning of more meaningful internal communication. Some participants stated clearly that they felt CityJet was a good company to work for, though they reported feeling some ambivalence. This meant they while they were hopeful about the future, they were also had some anxiety about how things will work out.

“Very good questions [from within the focus group]. Hopefully we got answers and feedback about improvements. Interesting day. Worry that Helsinki base is getting smaller, too smaller [sic]. We don't know anything about the future here.”

- Participant at Helsinki base

5.3.3 External company identity

This theme refers to the perception that some participants had of how the company was being experienced by customers through their interactions with them while on duty. Participants described how they felt that their representation of who they worked for, as perceived by passengers, had changed since they became CityJet employees. It was noted that during a transition period, some crew who were working on the same flights had not been wearing exactly matching uniforms. This meant that some passengers were unclear about who the crew were or indeed which company they were flying with. A crew member who participated in the Copenhagen groups explained that they had been asked by a passenger “Who is the real crew?”

The integration of several pre-existing companies within a new CityJet brand also meant that passengers were thought to be perceiving changes in operational procedures. On board flights, this was noted in terms of more complex announcements being delivered in multiple languages; this was felt to impact on customers, particularly during short flights. Further difficulties were

observed by staff when they felt that the communications within the general media about the new CityJet brand had not kept pace with internal communication processes; this meant they were unsure how to represent the brand in answering question posed by passengers.

“A story appeared in Nordic and Scandinavian media. Passengers were enquiring with crew members who knew little if anything about it.”

- Participant from Stockholm.

5.3.4 Building a new identity together

Many participants identified that they felt a need to create a company identity of which they could feel part. This was described as being important in representing the values they stood for as employees, particularly through consideration of the feedback of all staff by designing the right internal communication process. It was felt that the internal communication structure should be a reciprocal and collaborative process led by management but involving all staff. Staff expressed a strong desire for the challenges the company faced in developing a new internal and external CityJet identity to be the challenges that should be addressed across all bases involving all employees. There was widespread acknowledgment from all focus groups that the internal communication strategy that had been trialled in the current research was something really valuable and should be continued. One participant expressed acknowledgment of the fact that overcoming challenges for the company was a difficult process and stated that the efforts made by management were appreciated:

“I do appreciate your efforts. I do not think that the progress is easy at all.”

- Participant from Stockholm

5.4 Different in our sameness: developing a new culture

This superordinate theme represents the participants' views on the interactions of multiple cultures within a developing overall culture. CityJet was described as a company that had a new developing identity based on a pre-existing Dublin-based culture, whilst attempting to integrate the cultures of the companies it had acquired. This was depicted as taking place on multiple levels, from interpersonal daily contact between staff to standards and practices about routine operations, but also about how the national cultural identities of staff were different. This created a variety of mismatches in expectations that yielded frustration on both sides, but also the opportunity for great learning and growth for individual employees and the new

company as a whole. Within this developing context, numerous descriptions were offered of how different company departments could interact, both helpfully and unhelpfully.

5.4.1 New employees' perceptions of CityJet's culture

Most participants across the three bases spoke of their strong desire to feel they were participating in the delivery of the highest quality services possible. In trying to achieve and uphold high standards, they felt particularly aware of differences in operational practices between their previous companies and those used by CityJet. Given the opportunity provided to them to discuss their experience during this research, they identified that they felt they had an opportunity to offer suggestions about things that could be changed, doing so by describing the perceived cultural differences.

It is of note that participants were made up of pilots and cabin crew so their interactions with the company were primarily with Operations and Crew Control (OCC). Compared to the experiences they had previously, participants spoke about how the type of communication used by OCC was different. They said that CityJet OCC seemed to speak in a much more direct and firm manner than they been used to, which was seen as representative of a corporate culture to which they were struggling to adapt. However, there was a sense that the new culture of CityJet could be best integrated with employees' own cultures. A shared European identity was not seen as sufficient given cultural difference between countries, but it was felt that the shared CityJet identity should help staff to transcend this:

“This was a good initiative from you guys there! Even though we are all pretty much European, cultures differ and I think it would be a good idea to let the locals lead as much as possible under the common umbrella, of course.”

- Participant from Helsinki

5.4.2 Speaking Different Languages: Learning about Local Cultures

This theme referred to what most participants stated was necessary for CityJet management to do in order to understand the particularities of the cultures at each regional base. It was highlighted that when employees sense that there is sensitivity to local cultures, this has an important positive impact on their satisfaction with their managers. Communication mismatches between employees and OCC were sometimes experienced by local staff as rude

and they explained that they always felt more favourably disposed towards OCC requests when staff were overtly polite. Some staff also identified what they felt was a lack of understanding regarding local cultural practices about illness. This meant that they felt that their privacy was being invaded when they were asked for details about their illness.

“[The] general consensus is that the Irish do not understand the Nordic/Scandinavian culture in relation to sickness.”

- Participant from ??

Participants offered practical suggestions for CityJet management about what could be learned about local cultures. They noted that understanding local contexts entailed understanding important practical information, such as carrying out operations in Scandinavian climates that were very different to that in more southern European regions. It was also highlighted that detailed knowledge of local legal and contractual arrangements was important for head office to be able to understand regional staff. Overall, participants suggested that responding to local needs really means allowing a degree of local lead-out on operational practicalities while continuing to work under the same company umbrella. An example was offered in relation to uniforms:

“When reordering uniforms, allow designers to consult Nordic crews to get an insight into what they require.”

- Participant from Stockholm

5.4.3 Trying to Speak the Same Language: Interdepartmental Communication

This theme refers to the participants’ experience of how the process of integrating different working cultures within newly amalgamated organisations had been taking place. From the focus groups across all three bases, they highlighted the value of working relationships between staff at all levels of the company. Some participants particularly spoke about how there will be a lot to be gained from allowing cross-departmental sharing of responsibility, so as to minimise the impact of staff on duty. This was represented both as a source of frustration and targets for improvements. Specifically, the relationships between pilots, cabin crew, and OCC were identified as standing to benefit from work being done to ensure that all parties could understand how their communications could be perceived within each relevant cultural context.

Practical suggestions were also offered about the need to have formal communication structures between departments to ensure accurate information about employee availability, leave, and fitness to fly is automatically shared across the organisations as required.

5.5 Knowing what has to be done

This superordinate theme illustrates findings from all ten focus groups about how knowledge is held and communicated within the CityJet organisation. Participants spoke about how the knowledge that they had from work experience prior to CityJet was important to the successful operation of the new company. It was highlighted that the internal communications processes related to how practical aspects of duties could be improved. Employees associated this opportunity for improvement with the need to tap into the reservoir of shared knowledge held by staff. This could mean that information about day-to-day operations and specific technical procedures could be experienced as learning that was held within the organisation while constantly developing in a dynamic way.

5.5.1 Internal communication about duties

It emerged from the data that internal communication is a helpful tool to improve some of the processes currently in place, but this also requires the collaboration of all departments working together. Some participants said that they felt it was important that there should be more effective tracking of their queries directed to management in order to facilitate shared responsibility. Participants also emphasised that the quality of information communicated to local bases was really crucial for the successful operation of duties. In particular, it was reported that general communication issued to all staff could be improved by including base-specific information that could help busy employees to more easily identify what was relevant for them.

“Crew [are] receiving email that are not base specific. Large numbers of uncovered sectors and awkward to find those that are relevant.”

- Participant from ??

Similar to how employees spoke about the difficulties in cross-cultural communication, they also highlighted the manner in which internal communication about duties was delivered had important impacts on how applicable the information was for them in their daily work. They identified that they felt a need for greater support from head office for clarifying local

management and operational structures, through which communications about duties were received. Participants again spoke about their interactions with crew control as the context in which difficulties were most likely to be experienced. Some participants felt that their working lives could be improved through more active advanced planning of rostering and duty allocation.

“OCC spend their time fighting fires instead of thinking [and] planning ahead about being proactive”.

- Participant from ??

5.5.2 A reservoir of knowledge: how the company should learn from us

Many participants spoke about how they felt that their pre-existing skills and knowledge had not been fully valued by the organisation. They emphasised that they had local knowledge about matters such as regional routes, operating in local climactic conditions and airport-specific procedures. The possession of such knowledge was felt by participants to make them a valuable asset for the company, which had not been fully appreciated. In some situations where CityJet had implemented what were for new employees changes to systems such as crew control, participants felt unclear about the reason for the changes. This was particularly so when they felt that aspects of pre-existing systems functioned well. The message communicated from participants seemed to be that management need to learn more about the reality of the company on the ground in Scandinavia.

“The company does not appreciate the experience we have in our operative crew. You should listen to people who are out there actually working.”

- Participant from Helsinki

5.5.3 Safety before company identity: getting the right technical knowledge

This theme refers to employees’ concern with the technical and safety aspects of the roles. They spoke about how being part of new company meant there was a need to be provided with important information about operating new aircraft. Some participants wished to highlight how such concerns were more important than any other matters about company identity. They spoke about the practical challenges of operating new aircraft while integrating this with their previous practices for ground control. The new experiences they were encountering when

working alongside new people at other bases were seen as a challenge could be better met if work was put into improving procedures for contacting each other.

“ CRJ [new aircraft] is a dream in the air, a nightmare on the ground.”

- Participant from Helsinki

Chapter 6. Discussion

6.1 Introduction

Analysis of data from ten focus groups conducted with staff at CityJet Scandinavian bases led to the identification of four superordinate themes in the data. These themes are significant in terms of their implications for the practice of internal marketing, within CityJet at a practical level, and at a theoretical level. As illustrated in this discussion chapter, the themes also highlight important perspectives on how the processes of internal marketing can interact with broader processes within the company.

6.2 Reflexivity

The lead researcher is a French-born woman of African descent in her late thirties living in Ireland for more than a decade. This means that she understands the Irish culture in which CityJet operates but this is influenced by a French-African perspective. This also means that she has particular values and experiences related to openness and community, as well as interacting with cultures different to her own, which can impact on her view of what is appropriate of terms how a company supports and interacts with its employees. As a CityJet employee herself, she of course will have a reaction to comments about the company. It was important for her to be aware of her own assumptions and background in order to attempt to stay true to the data.

6.3 Critique of the methodology

As explained in Chapter 4, the choice of focus groups to collect data was a deliberate one, as it was felt to be the most pragmatic way of capturing meaningful information with a relatively large number of participants for a qualitative study. The number of participants can perhaps be regarded as an important strength of the research, in that it allows for the findings to have meaning for the company being studied. The fact that the research was conducted in such a way as to be focused solely on that company means that generalisability of findings to other contexts may be limited. However, it can be argued that the findings do have relevance, particularly for other airlines but more broadly for other companies in service industries.

The fact that the research team were all employees of the same company as the participants might make it difficult to claim that an unbiased approach could be taken to data collection and analysis. While it is acknowledged that such a position for the researcher did impact on how

the data was understood, it is also suggested that the particular nature of this study required in-depth knowledge of the airline industry in order to be able to conduct a case study. The complexity of the operational, organizational, and commercial nature of the airline industry is such that it may be very difficult for someone without insider knowledge to fully appreciate what participants were trying to communicate.

Perhaps what poses a greater challenge to the validity of the current research is not the lead researcher's membership of the organization per se, but her connection to senior management. She has a responsibility toward the company she works for. Therefore, she is faced with a challenge about how to represent her company as a manager while simultaneously being a researcher who could potentially deliver bad news. Further, the fact the research was not initiated externally but was commissioned by the board of directors means that the researchers effectively had responsibility to report back to the board, which could be seen as limiting the independence of the research.

Indeed, there was a conscious decision made by the board directors about which bases within the company to focus on. Rather than being commissioned as a company-wide initiative, the board understandably chose to focus on those areas in which they were aware that there had been difficulties. This raises the possibility that the data obtained may be somewhat biased towards negative appraisals by employees. However, even if this the case, it is important for any company to learn from employees who are working in challenging environments. It can also be seen as responsible action by a board of directors to seek to learn information about employees' experiences in as real a way as possible, even if the feedback is critical of the company.

For participants in the focus groups, although this was not reported as having been among their concerns, it needs to be acknowledged that the mandatory attendance at the workshops prior to the focus groups could have impacted how they felt about participating, as could the fact they were participating alongside their colleagues. Further, the content of the informational workshops may inevitably have elicited particular feelings about the company that participants then focused on during the groups. Although the facilitators took care to provide factual information to initiate the conversation, it was perhaps unavoidable that this will communicate a particular message about the company to which attendees may react more or less favourably. Indeed, the lead researcher, irrespective of her lack of involvement at operational levels in the

company, could still have been seen as a representative of senior management by the participants.

6.4 Belonging to CityJet

It emerged as a striking finding of the research that many of the ex-Blue1 staff did not report feeling part of CityJet over two years after their former company had been acquired. The implication seemed to be that they remained strongly attached to their previous company identity and the transition to embracing the new company was difficult. The importance of creating relationships across entire organizations is crucial to ensuring the viability of companies (Kaplan, 2017). Although CityJet had initially tried to create a process of integration within the company, it appears that it may to date have been insufficient.

As shown in the figure 6.1, the analysis of the data yielded five themes indicating crucial elements for creating a sense of belonging among employees within CityJet. All five elements need to be co-present, rather than any one being a prerequisite for another. The sense of belonging to the company was reported as potentially being enhanced by the presence of any one element but it is really the cumulative experience of all five that seems to create a feeling of belongingness among employees of this company.



Figure 6.1 Belonging to CityJet

It is of note that as well as these elements representing processes that employees benefit from experiencing on an ongoing basis, there seemed to be value in the experience of particular significant positive events that helped employees to feel they were part of the organization. The perceived quality of trustworthiness within contact with colleagues and management, as indicated by the theme of ‘belongingness requires authentic contact’ appeared to be what gave significance to events such as participation in the focus groups. This is in line with the findings of Erkemen and Esen (2012) that trust between managers and employees is linked to employee-customer relationships, and ultimately brand reputation.

The current research underscores the importance of such employee-manager relationships, but also develops this somewhat, to suggest that the facilitation of meaningful contact between colleagues can be important elements in the process of building trust within the organisation. However, it is contact with head office that seemed to be the greatest value to employees in helping them feel they belonged to CityJet. Gruning (1992) had similarly outlined the importance of implementing systems to encourage dialogue between employees and management. Indeed, the absence of such contact caused employees to feel insecure about their future in the company, though that insecurity also seemed to be as much related to the lack of information about the company as to the lack of contact.

The lead researcher was aware that there was no current danger posed to employees’ job security so it was striking to learn that employees felt that way. It emphasised the impact of lack of communication on their sense of belonging to the organisation. Putting adequate internal communications systems in place can potentially serve to offset such experiences for employees. As explained by Sune and Gibb (2015), this needs to be central when an organisation is undergoing dynamic change such as has been happening in CityJet; it falls to managers to create those specific processes for teams. This research adds some further insight to this assertion; it is not simply about change management for profitability’s sake but also about supporting employees’ personal sense of security while change is ongoing.

Feeling appreciated by the organization and having a sense that being included as part of the new team were important element of feeling belongingness for employees. When these elements were missing, employees felt disconnected from the organization. This experience was frequently described of in terms of significant negative events, such as feeling mistreated

when spoken to in what was perceived to a rude manner when on the phone to Operations and Crew Control (OCC).

From an operational of view, it is to be noted that such events can be difficult to manage as the function of OCC is often that of trying to manage crises and staff in OCC are working under intense pressure. It might be an interesting adjunct to the current findings to examine the perspectives of staff in OCC who are perceived as speaking in an abrupt manner at times. This is not to dismiss the experiences of the participants in this study, but rather to highlight that managing the processes of internal communication in an organization requires managers to engage with the complexity of different sides of internal company relationships.

In terms of the marketing literature, this theme of belonging to CityJet has relevance for Giannakis *et al.*'s (2005) assertion regarding the importance of considering employees in an expanded concept of the marketing mix. It was of particular note that employees associated their feeling of belongingness, especially as it related to feeling appreciated, with a direct impact on their motivation to perform their duties. This really serves to identify the indispensability of employee relations processes to the activity of marketing a successful company.

6.5 Knowing who we work for

There was very clear indication from the data that the staff at Scandinavian bases felt they had little detailed knowledge about CityJet, and almost no information about the senior management team. The workshops that were conducted prior to the focus groups involved presenting pictures of senior managers; employees could not name them or identify their roles, with the exception of the chairman. Although some names were familiar once they were given, staff felt this was just because they recognised 'signatures at the end of an email' and not because they actually knew who people were. The discussions that ensued across the focus groups consistently emphasised the importance of staff learning about the company for which they work.

Figure 6.2 demonstrates the relationship between the four themes that were organised under the over-arching theme of 'Knowing who we work for'. The activity of internal communication that provided information about the company itself was seen as fundamental to a process of

learning which could inform the development of a sense of company identity. This identity was spoken about as the distinct but related concepts of internal and external company identity. Participants then saw themselves as participating in an ongoing collaborative company activity of incorporating previous identities with information they had been given about how CityJet management wished to communicate its company identity. Analysis of the data indicated that this was experienced as a process of reciprocal engagement that reinforced and developed a shared identity.

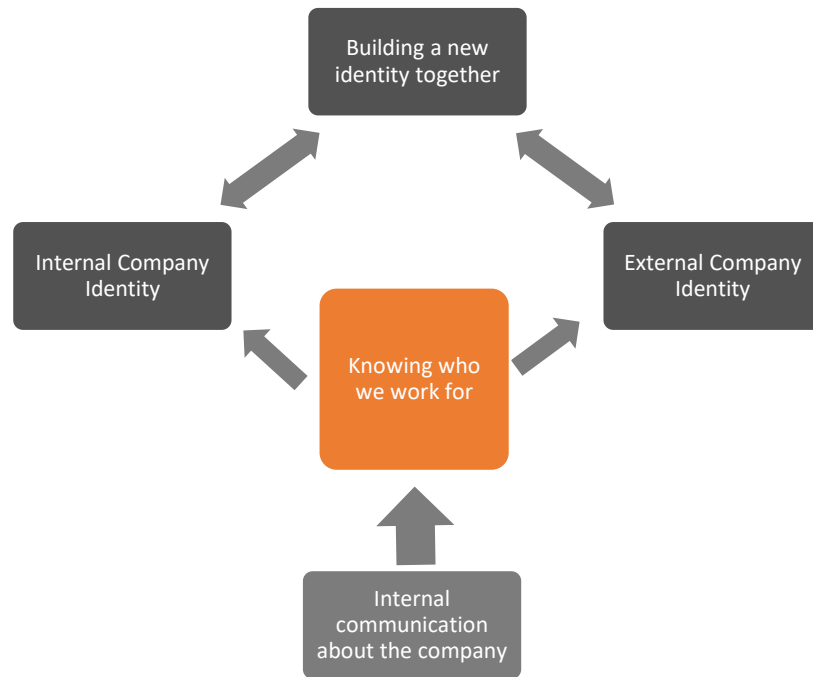


Figure 6.2 Knowing who we work for

Having knowledge about a company can be seen as fundamental to being able to connect to the organisation, something which Benyamin and Carnelli (2016) associated with capacities for creativity and problem resolution. The importance of communicating information about company values and how this relates to employee roles is an activity that is led by management and ultimately is essential to the creation of trust (Pohlman *et al.*, 2000; Mishra *et al.*, 2014). The findings of this study emphasise that this is a starting point for further reciprocal engagement that is required to deepen a sense of shared identity; participants wanted to feel that they are active in creating that identity.

Indeed, it seemed that the real value for employees of internal communication about the company itself was expressed in the view that internal communication strategies should be part of routine company activity. As described in Chapter 2, there is an assumed link between

employee identification with common team goals and participation in the common effort, and commercial activity. Understanding the company can be seen as a necessary first step in becoming a 'brand advocate' during the conduction of regular duties (Du Preez and Bendixen, 2015). It seemed that participants felt that much could be achieved by conducting this through collaborative engagement. This is consistent with both Pervaiz *et al.*'s (2003) emphasis on the importance of collaboration between departments and Zaumane's (2016) assertion that improper internal communication can damage brand reputation.

The distinction that emerged between internal and external company identities was interesting. Participants reported that they wished to contribute to the development of both forms of company identity. It has seemed to be assumed within the marketing literature that a sense of internal identification with a company is almost a pre-requisite for the communication of an external identity that is defined explicitly by management. Whereas the data in this study do not necessarily contradict such an assumption, they also suggest that the manner in which the process plays out may be much more nuanced than just establishing a mechanism for management to communicate to customers through employees.

Participants, who had become CityJet employees because of a corporate acquisition rather than being directly recruited, saw themselves as being able to contribute to a shared sense of cohesion among employees and also influencing the presentation of the company brand to customers. However, they primarily felt that they needed management to lead the way as they were unable to co-develop a new identity without knowledge of how the managerial vision for the new company is understood at head office.

Aaker's (1997) work on emotional brand attachment for customers could perhaps also have relevance for employees' experiences in this regard. Much as it is assumed that customers need to identify with perceived brand characteristics in order to feel connected to a brand, employees could be seen as needing to identify with the qualities of an organization in order to be able to present the brand to customers. In the absence of adequate information about the organization, it became very difficult for participants in this study to feel that they could do so. An interesting avenue of investigation in this regard might be to consider whether the characteristics with which employees may ultimately identify are in line with the identity CityJet sought to communicate since its 2015 rebrand.

A counterpoint to this assumption can also be found within the data. Although it may very well have been because of the manner in which the focus groups were constructed, it is of note that most participants rarely discussed their relationships with customers. It was anticipated in the ethical concerns outlined in Chapter 4 that it was possible that some participants could see the focus groups primarily as an opportunity to air grievances, such that other experiences might receive less attention. Assertions within the literature, and indeed, common sense suggests that employees might benefit from being engaged with by their employer, just as the company engages with its customers, but participants in this study did not explicitly make such a link. Rather, they wished to see themselves as co-creators of an organisation into which they felt themselves to have been co-opted.

6.6 Different in our sameness: Developing a new culture

It was clear from this theme that, whereas participants felt at that time that they were somewhat detached from the overall company culture, an achievement of a form of cultural integration was still something to which they aspired. The type of culture that had developed among staff in Dublin, Paris, and London over many years was frequently referred to by employees using the term ‘CityJet family’. Strong bonds between staff of the organisation have often continued even after some staff had moved on to work for other airlines. The lead researcher can attest to personal experience of this in different roles over a decade.

It was thus very striking to speak with participants who had been employees of CityJet for over two years, yet who did not feel this kind of affinity with the company or connection with their new colleagues. For some participants, it was perhaps the case that they felt such a connection to each other within Blue1 and they had some difficulty in accepting that things had changed. It also seemed at times that becoming part of CityJet understandably meant that they were scared that they would lose something through a change of culture. When describing their views of the culture of their new company, it was frequently the case that they pointed out the many differences, even in negative terms. Figure 6.3, overleaf, outlines the relationship between the three themes gathered under this heading.

Participants represented the theme of developing a new culture not quite as a process of integration of parts into a new whole, nor the assimilation of new parts into the pre-existing structure of CityJet. Rather, it was identified as a process of learning to work with the co-

existence of difference. This meant that learning was required from CityJet head office about the new bases, not just that the new bases needed to learn about their new owners. Indeed, it was notable that participants had very specific feedback for how different departments should work alongside each other. The new culture that could be developed was seen by participants as that which could change them but could also change CityJet from what it had been.

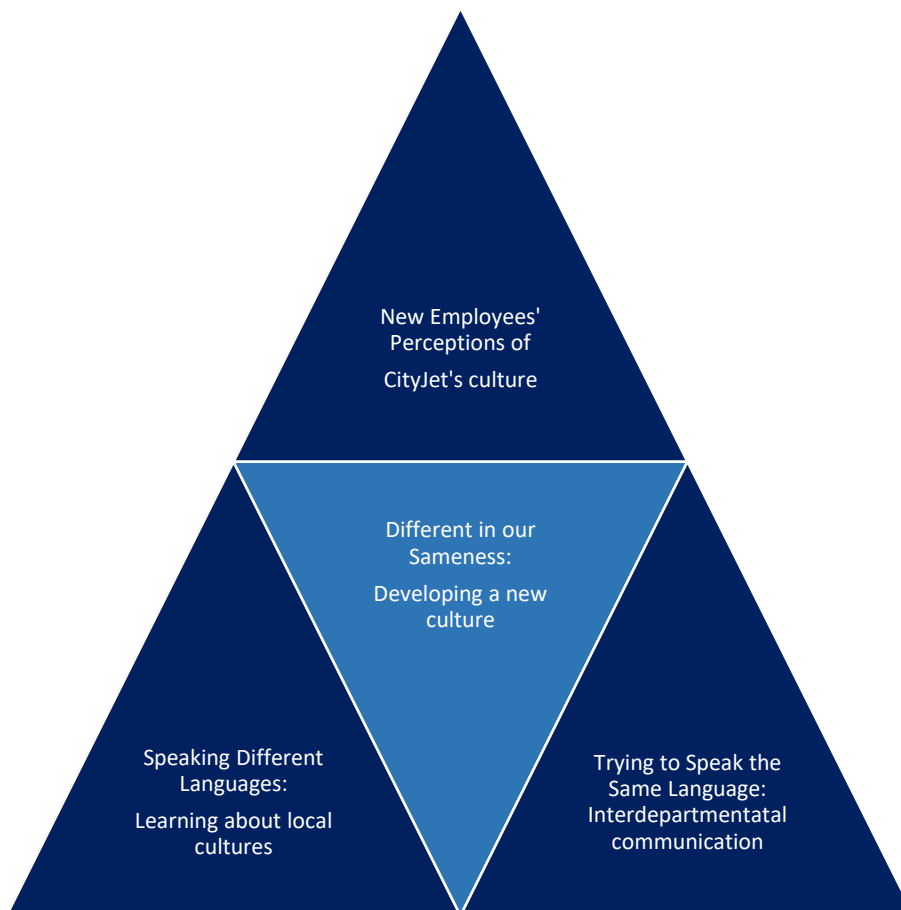


Figure 6.3 Different in our Sameness: Developing a new culture

Employees who participated in the focus groups felt that there was a lack of communication between company departments or a lack of action based on feedback given by employees. Such collaboration between departments is, of course, what internal communication is all about. The feedback that employees gave may raise questions for CityJet about which departments should be involved in leading initiatives to develop and maintain highly quality communication. Pervaiz *et al.* (2003) suggested that internal communication should be a partnership between HR and marketing. However, the current study suggests that it may need to be regarded as a whole-company activity that, while being led by HR and marketing, it cannot be assumed to be just the responsibility of any one or two departments.

The lack of substantial mention of cultural difference among employees within the HR literature is brought into sharp relief by the current findings. In fact, the information offered by the participants in this study means that cultural processes within organizations cannot be ignored. Internal communications need to be implemented on the basis of understanding cultural differences rather than being about educating employees about pre-ordained company culture. In essence, internal communication should not be just about speaking with staff but should be as much about listening to employees. Chong (2007) had suggested that employees should be walking embodiments of the core values of the company. This appears to be a valid suggestion but perhaps it also worth considering how a company should seek to embody the cultural values of its employees.

6.7 Knowing what needs to be done

Continuing in the same vein as the previous theme, this theme highlights how participating employees felt that the company needed to listen and learn from them. However, the difference was that this theme focused on much more practical, day-to-day aspects of operations. For the lead researcher, as a member of company management, it was certainly comforting to hear some employees identify that safety is their primary concern! This also speaks to a sense of shared purpose; it is heartening to hear about how employees and managers, despite differences of opinion, are still committed to delivering an excellent high quality service to passengers. There has a ben long tradition of high level safety standards for CityJet and it is encouraging for the company that this placed at the centre of how employees see the company as it continues to grow.

Perhaps it may be not be quite so heartening for the company to learn about how new employees may have felt disenfranchised. It was clear that many participants felt that the company was not tapping in to the organizational knowledge that had been held under the structure of Blue1. There was obviously a strong message being delivered to CityJet management by employees. They had skills that they wanted to implement, as well as particular knowledge that they believed may not have been as available to CityJet as it had been to them. Figure 6.4 below sets an organogram illustrating this theme.

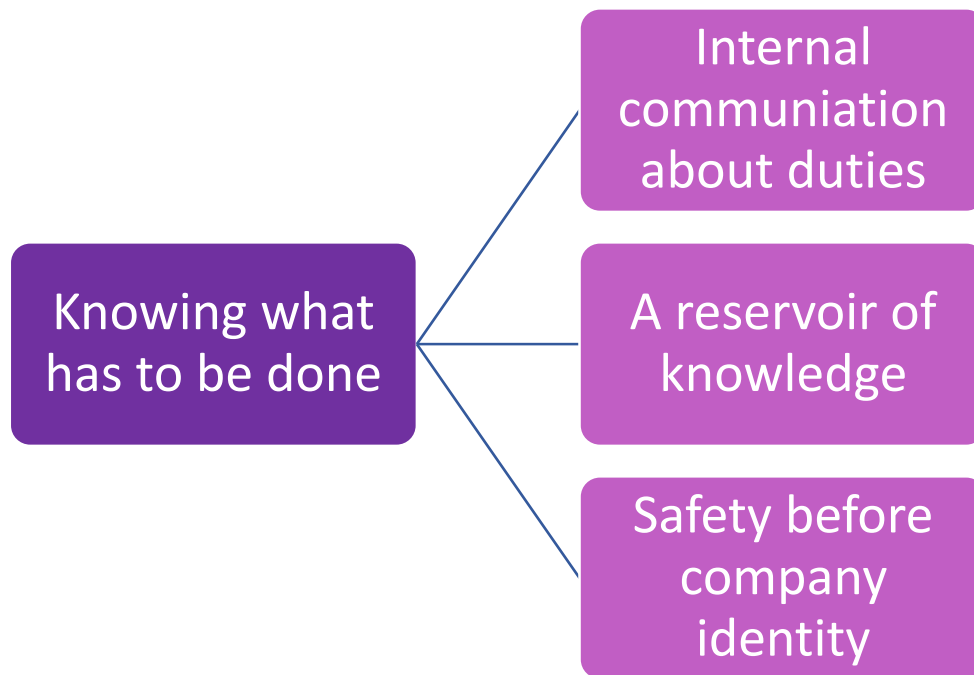


Figure 6.4 Knowing what has to be done

This message has important implications for understanding the process of organizational change management that CityJet has been engaged in. Huber *et al* (1993) pointed out the importance of a re-evaluation of processes through a deep scrutiny of internal and external factors. The participants in this study have offered some suggestions about what those factors may be for CityJet. For the company to function in an adaptable manner, it is incumbent on managers to realise that there may be information learned from new employees that the company did not already know. It further serves as a reminder to a marketing department that in seeking to develop internal communication with all employees, marketers need to remember that the priority of the whole company is ultimately the safety of passengers. Of course, keeping your passengers safe can only be assumed to impact positively on company identity.

The internal communication referred to within this theme is of a different kind to internal communication about the company itself. Rather this refers to communication about the actual day-to-day operational procedures. Although this may appear to be a quite different kind of information provision to that of the workshops that preceded the focus groups, it can be argued that it is no less important for company identity. Anderson (2009) reported a significant correlation between operational issues and customer satisfaction; this study appears to lend weight to that assertion.

Chapter 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Recommendations for CityJet

The primary purpose of this case study, as stated above, was to provide meaningful feedback to the board of directors of CityJet, who commissioned the research. It is worth noting that almost all of the 90 employees who participated greatly valued the initial implementation of the internal communication strategy. The commissioning of the research led to a very interesting finding; the procedures used in the research itself emerged as a manner of engagement that employees reported as being closely akin to how they would like their company to engage with them in the ordinary course of their work.

The implications for CityJet's internal communication strategies are significant. The findings with regard to how employees experienced these strategies suggest that the concern of the marketing team should move beyond a primary focus on external communication, not least because of Yang's (2007) finding that there is a positive correlation between commitment satisfaction for employees and company reputation. The value of conducting such strategies as first line initiatives in employee engagement is to be emphasized. Further, internal communication needs to be done through whole-company initiatives; they need to be led by marketing and HR, but the management of all departments should have a regular opportunity for constructive collaboration.

This necessitates the involvement of senior management from head office. Employees were clear that part of the real value of the focus groups was the authentic engagement they felt was offered through face-to-face communication. As part of regular, ongoing internal communication workshops, it may be helpful for employees to have at least one senior manager present to meet them and discuss their concerns. Furthermore, the value of the workshops and focus groups was such for the participants in the current study that it points out the importance of extending the strategy across the entire company and assessing every department at all CityJet bases.

It is of note that while the findings from the three Scandinavian bases may have relevance for the whole company, the participants themselves stressed that there are locally-relevant meanings that need to be appreciated. This suggests that there may well be experiences at other

bases that differ in important ways from those in Scandinavia. It is also essential to be aware of how the cultural difference among employees in CityJet may manifest. The most obvious example of this from the current study is the way that employees felt about the manner in which they were being communicated with by management, particularly OCC, in the course of their duties. Putting the necessary effort into ensuring that employees understand how to communicate with each in ways that respect cultural differences in communication styles is likely to pay significant dividends.

CityJet management must remember the link identified in the case study between internal communication and company reputation. When work is put into ensuring the presence of effective structures and processes within the organization, this can be assumed to have a knock-on effect on quality of customer service and ultimately on profitability. Du Preez and Bendixen's (2015) concept of creating brand champions in organizations highlights the usefulness of explaining the company to employees. It may be helpful to consider investing in training for all employees across every department to encourage them to understand the company mission and values. In tandem with this, employees have said that they are more likely to feel they belong to the company when communications from head office are inclusive of clear appreciations of base-specific information.

This case study also provided data from which it could be identified that there are organizational-specific concerns related to the process of managing change. Sune and Gibb (2015) had written about the importance of organizational change beginning at root level, such that the absence of constant reviewing and testing of strategies could lead to severe difficulties. The collapse of Spanair as outlined in Chapter X, section x may well serve as an illustration for CityJet of what can wrong if such caution is not taken.

7.2 Implications for marketing practice

The shift of emphasis indicated throughout this case study has been that of extending the focus of marketing strategies away from an exclusive concern with marketing directly to customers to also include a focus on internal communication. The findings suggest that there is a need to reposition the importance of the employee within the marketing mix. This means internal marketing is not simply a matter of addressing the quality of employee relations but is in fact fundamentally linked to how the company is presented to the external world. In practice, this means that marketers should give equal consideration to how they will work with employees

within an organization as to how they are addressing consumers. A company needs to focus on how it creates its identity internally as well as externally in order to address matters of viability, particularly within service industries.

7.3 Suggestions for further research

As noted above, there will be value for CityJet itself in extending the current research across the organization and it is hoped that this case study will serve as useful basis for so doing. The case study also offers some reconceptualization of widely held precepts within marketing, such as the marketing mix and concepts of brand identity, which will all be worthy of further investigation. Research on internal marketing and internal branding specifically has been very limited to date; it appears there is a great need to identify and develop understandings of the fundamental mechanisms that may be involved in ensuring that internal marketing can be planned and conducted successfully.

Whereas there is a wealth of literature regarding the best media through which to communicate with customers, there is a lack of information about the internal branding tools that are likely to be most effective in communicating with employees. Although it was not reported by participants in the current case study, this researcher noticed that there was variability in the extensiveness of branding at different locations; it will be worth investigating how the visibility of branding within different company locations could impact on employee identification with the brand.

7.4 Summary and Conclusion

This case study was concerned with the experiences of employees at newly acquired regional CityJet bases in Scandinavia. The recruitment of participants and the quality of engagement with the research surpassed expectations. Four themes were identified to represent a large dataset drawn from ten focus groups. The themes of ‘Belonging to CityJet’, ‘Knowing who we work for’, ‘Different in our sameness: creating a new culture’, and ‘Knowing what has to be done’ provided multiple useful insights into how new CityJet employees experienced their identification with the company as well as their sense of integration within a developing company culture.

It was established from the current research that there is indeed a strong link between internal communication processes and how employees feel within a company. It appeared that this was

not, as described in previous literature, a relatively passive process of communicating information from management to employees. Rather, employees had very strong ideas about how internal communication should operate most successfully, which primarily meant that it should be an ongoing, collaborative process involving management and employees, in which there was co-construction of a brand identity.

In terms of the overarching research question regarding the nature of the link between internal marketing and employee identification with a brand, it appears that in this case study, the association was to a large extent mediated by the degree to which employees experienced a sense of internal company identity. Further, it seemed clear that the cultural differences among employees very much impacted on how they perceived the company identity. This suggested that creating greater connectedness with an organization may be predicated on management taking active steps to incorporate the cultural complexity of its employees into routine operational and communication procedures.

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