

**CHALLENGE OF HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS IN
BUILDING A HOSPITAL BRAND:
A CASE STUDY OF NAN AH HOSPITAL**



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ABSTRACT

The importance of employees' perception has often been overlooked by service organization when dealing with the creation of a strong brand. Yet in brand literature, the employee role is recognized as critical in the deliverance of perceived service quality as promised by the brand. Little consideration and research has been given to understanding the potential hidden value summarized in an organization's brand as a result of the employee attitude toward internal branding. A case study approach was adopted to investigate Nan Ah Hospital by conducting a qualitative research in methodology. In-depth interviews were conducted with participants from the hospital. The result has provided a great insight into the perception of healthcare professionals of the challenge of building a hospital brand.

KEY WORDS: CORPORATE BRANDING/ BRANDING/EMPLOYEES/
INTERNAL BRANDING

22 pages

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The concept of develop branding has seen by today management level of healthcare organizations (HCOs) as an important strategy to stay competitive against the competitors. In Thailand, healthcare industry has gained its international popularity especially in the recent decade. The one vital driven factor is the long promoted medical tourism. Further, the country has healthcare professionals trained in advanced countries, modern facilities, advanced equipment and progressive clinical and medical research records. In the domestic market, as more healthcare options become available to consumers (e.g., private clinics, after-hour drug stores), the industry increasing in its competition level will be expected. According to Healthcare Report for Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand ("Healthcare reports for," 2013) by Orissa International, Consumer expenditures on health goods and medical services increased from BT310,088 million (US\$10,136 million) in 2007 to BT405,571.20 million (US\$13,257 million) in 2012. While consumer expenditure on pharmaceutical products, medical appliances and equipment also increased from BT47,140.60 million (US\$1,540 million) in 2007 to BT61,781.20 (US\$2,019 million) in 2012. Table 1 details the consumer expenditures on both segments from 2007 till 2012.

Marketing will play an integral role as hospitals in Thailand compete on care and quality outcomes. Effective marketing strategy will require organizations to develop a strong brand identity. Although a corporate brand creates awareness and recognition via a name of logo, it needs to articulate with key stakeholders by demonstrating a long term commitment in corporate branding pledge, as such will become a mark of assurance. (Balmer & Gray, 2003) (Knox & Bickertson, 2003) In addition, it can contribute to organization growth with the present of high levels of satisfaction and emotional commitment.

**Table 1.1 Consumer Expenditures on Healthcare Segments between 2007-2012
(BT million)**

Segment	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Health goods and medical services	310,088.0	327,968.0	346,416.0	355,728.1	374,679.0	405,571.2
Pharmaceutical products, medical appliances and equipments	47,140.6	49,882.8	52,711.8	54,150.5	57,056.2	61,781.2

For HCOs to build the strong brand identity, it has to recognize the important of employee factor. Since the characteristics of healthcare service is highly personalized, build branding for HCO will depend largely on their medical personnel to fulfill the service promise to actual service deliver, thus become brand identity. Healthcare branding, therefore, requires organized commitment to delivering consistence unique standards through the organization's services. A successful branding strategy must address how to preserve equity and leverage equities to build trust as well as how to manage consumer perceptions and emotions regarding the HCO. Therefore, this paper will attempt to explore paper will elaborate more on how the HCO can build its branding as well as the challenge of healthcare professionals in building a hospital brand using a case study of Nan Ah Hospital in Thailand. Also, it will bring unique perspective of the healthcare professionals that seem to be overlooked by many branding scholars.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Corporate Branding for HCO

A recent change and rapid growth in today healthcare industry competitions has propelled many HCOs to build corporate brands value to separate oneself from other. Refer to Balmer (strategic corporate brand), the corporate branding philosophy represents a clear agreement between an organization and its key stakeholder group. It is experienced through corporate and staff behavior, and, importantly, through the organisation's products and/or services. Branding expert, David Aaker, describes that the value inherent in a brand as brand equity which is defined as a set of assets such as name awareness, loyal customers, perceived quality, and associations that are linked to the brand (its name and symbol) and add (or subtract) value to the product or service being offered. (Beckham, 1996) Therefore, the reason for branding is simple, "if consumers are more familiar with a company's brand, they're more likely to purchase the company's products."

There are unique challenges associated with branding services as opposed to branding products. According to Berry and Parasuraman, (Beckham, 1996) for a service HCO like a hospital or physician group, the institutional brand is the primary brand. However, for consumer goods, the product brand is the primary brand. Therefore, the service brand is selected or rejected based on institutional brand. For example, Procter and Gamble own many of the world most recognizable brands such as Tide and Comet but most consumers do not care that the maker is Procter & Gamble. Unlike service brand customer will select or reject the company brand such as FedEx or Avis. Moreover, service is lack of the basic physical presence that facilitates individual product such as packaging or display. Most professional services organizations sell an intangible, therefore cannot be fully experienced until after purchased. Professional services must build on reputation, trust, and, a strong corporate brand and establishes these qualities in the minds of prospects. (Dawson,

2012) Under this light, establishing service brand require different approach to the consumer goods. The service HCOs must accentuate on managing service performance for the lack of their intangibility.

2.2 How to build HCO brand

Healthcare is one of the most important, nonetheless personalized services to consumer experiences. A brand is a promise to consumers that the service organization will deliver on the care as promise. In addition, it can contribute to organization growth with the present of high levels of satisfaction and emotional commitment. Healthcare branding, therefore, requires organized commitment to delivering consistence unique standards through the organization's services. A successful branding strategy must address how to preserve equity and leverage equities to build trust as well as how to manage consumer perceptions and emotions regarding the healthcare organization (Speak, 1996; Mangini, 2002) Thus, top service HCOs are able to enhance their brand by making the service tangible in the appearance and responsiveness of their employees. (Beckham, 1996)

Service organizations including HCOs pursuing corporate brand strategies are much more dependent on their employees delivering their brand promises than product brands. Moreover, many branding scholars also have recognized the integral role of employees in deliver the consistent brand' promise on highly personalized services. (Beckham, 1996; Mangini, 2002) Therefore, many service organizations have to decide how to incorporate and orchestrate their employees into consistently deliver the service.

To become a high-performing firm, it has to understand and orchestrate, the important part, their employees in company-wide. In order to implement successful internal branding, many organizations have chosen to build the brand through internal communication as a key instrument (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007; Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2012). Internal communications aim to influence employees' brand knowledge, attitudes and behaviors. Thus internal communication, according to Bennis (Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2012), should be characterized as dialogue and not monologue. He further explains that an organization cannot hopes to

communicate its vision and values and hoping employees will perform accordingly. It must engage employees into dialogue to what vision and values mean to organization and its stakeholders, to have it internalize by employees.

2.3 Employees

According to (King & Grace, 2008) people possess skills, knowledge and experiences, which are significant economic value to organization. Since those skills, knowledge, and experience enhance productivity, thus they represent capital that is too valuable to lost. Therefore, whether the positioning of their corporate brand is successful remains dependent on the employees' behaviors in producing and delivering the service. Similar to (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007), also concur that customer-facing employees exert a certain degree of influence on customers' and other stakeholders' perceptions about the brand and/or the organization, which defines the success of brand positioning. Their distinctive skills can create a company's competitive advantage that may be difficult to be matched. Therefore, employees are both shareholders and customers of their organization's brands. Unfortunately, this makes it harder to maintain the distinction between internal and external dimensions of corporate brands. (Schultz & Chernatony, 2002)

The service including HCO and corporate branding literature has support that staffs are influential on customers and other stakeholders' brand perceptions through their role in delivering both functional (what are delivered) and emotional (how they are delivered) values (internal branding to) A brand can further provide incremental of trust for the service organization in extending its services line and even in diversifying into dissimilar services. (Balmer & Gray, 2003) Stephen (King & Grace, 2008) reasoned that the company brand required a multidisciplinary approach with the human resources department playing a vital role. Thus, the importance of staff in corporate brand building was emphasized, as was culture.

Under this reasons, employees will be recognized as an essential part of building HCO brand as they are the vehicle for making the brand meaningful especially in the service HCO. Although, creating a coherent perception of a company in the minds of its various stakeholders is a major challenge, it is the management

responsibility to create and maintain a coherent corporate brand image for each individual stakeholder. (Einwiller & Will, 2002) Since corporate branding consists of multiple stakeholders communicating with the organization's employees, its success will largely relies on employees' attitude and behaviors in delivering the brand promise to external stakeholders

Nonetheless, branding cannot bring service organization to surpass the disadvantages intrinsic in their characteristics. The service HCO indisputably remain exposed to variability because of their dependent on their employees. (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007) Finding suitable employees who have an affinity with the corporate brand would suggest that corporations benefit not only in terms of employee commitment to the corporate brand, but also benefit from an apparent financial advantage in terms of the human resource costs such as recruitment, training, the employment of agency staff and the payment of overtime. Employees who are in agreement with an organization's brand are more likely to demonstrate consistent supporting effort in how the organization's brand position to external publics perception as well as its services. The experience of external customers in their interactions with a service HCO and its services are dependent on such internal factors as internal service quality, employee satisfaction, and employee productivity. By establishing effective the management of human resource systems, an organization may engage its employees in its corporate brand-building plan. This engagement of employees in the brand, leading to their representation of brand qualities to outside constituents is often times referred to as internal branding. (Aurand, Gorchels, & Bishop, 2005) For this reason, internal brand management has become a significant strategic organizational initiative. Without full understanding of brand knowledge, employees are unable to convert the brand vision into brand reality. (Punjaisri & Wilson, 200; King & Grace, 2008)

2.4 Challenge of HCO and branding

Internal branding is considered as a medium link to create powerful corporate branding. It can assist the organization in aligning its internal process and corporate culture with those of the brand. As Webster argues that human systems or

employees require a central theme upon which the employee can shape their behavior so as to be consistent with delivering service to consumer and organization expectations. (King & Grace, 2008) Thus, successful internal branding creates employees' commitment and loyalty to the brand. When employees take on the brand values, they deliver on the brand promise consistently between the company and its stakeholders. Therefore, internal branding is an important element to align the behaviors of employees with the brand values.

Schultz (Schultz & Chernatony, 2002) has raised various challenges in creating brand of organizations including HCOs. With increased stakeholders, such as employees, involvement, the more engaging they become, the more difficult it will be for the firm to control brand coherence. Managing the coherence of the brand with such a diverse group of stakeholders can be a very difficult task. Schultz explains that it is unrealistic to expect managers to control their corporate brand, since there is diversity of perceptions about the values of corporate brands.

Another challenge is to overcome turf and internal rivalry in managing the brand. The creation of a corporate brand requires that branding changes from solely being considered from a marketing discipline to a more strategic perspective, implying the brand becomes the responsibility of the whole organization, led by the director of the organization. No one internal department or person can claim to control the brand as their internal department responsibility instead entails the organization different functions or departments will each contribute to building the brand.

Promoting the brand to employees, and educating them about brand values, is steadily growing in popularity for many companies because they realized the inherent power of an informed workforce committed to delivering the brand promise. (Aurand, Gorchels, & Bishop, 2005). For workforce to succeed on building organization brand, it strongly demands the creation of a work environment that fosters encouragement as well as an appreciation and understanding of the organization's employees. However, little research has been devoted to exploring the attitude of the healthcare professionals in HCO. As the concept underlines the role of services HCO's healthcare professionals, their views may really well be more important to the management if they choose to implement the most appropriate internal branding strategies. This paper focuses on the perceptions and attitude of

healthcare professionals. A number of publications have identified that successful internal branding engenders employees' commitment to, identification with and loyalty to the brand. (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007; Beckham, 1996) Thus, the objective of internal branding is to ensure that employees transform adopted brand messages into brand reality for customers and other stakeholders as part of brand building.



CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Interview Method

In an attempt to address this aim, a case-study approach is selected along with a qualitative approach. The research approach derives from the literature review findings. The purpose of this paper is to learn about healthcare professionals' perceptions of their HCO's brand and how that it relates to their roles and responsibilities. Therefore, theoretical of a case study approach of single cases provides an opportunity to present a unique and a revelatory case that can give deep description of HCO in branding (Yin 1994). Moreover, the qualitative approach was adopted to get an in-depth and inside detail of a specified domain of experience (King & Grace, 2008). The in-depth interview was selected, as it appeared to be the most effective method of data collection. It has an ability to obtain large amount of data quickly as well as to follow up and seek clarification. Moreover, similar researchs also adopted the in-depth interview to obtain their data collection. (King & Grace, 2008; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007) Further, the convergent interview technique and process is adopted in this case study. Since convergent interviewing satisfies the criteria for methodological accuracy of internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) (Jepsen & Rodwell 2008). To fulfill the objective of this paper is to explore detail of the participants' perspectives, thus the use of in-depth interviews is the most appropriate and sufficient data gathering method.

To get the consistency among the interviewers for completing the research objective, this paper will develop the questions model and research design derive from previous study of (King & Grace, 2008; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007) The research questions were developed:

Table 3.1 Research questions and corresponding interview questions (umbrella only)

<p><i>Research Question 1 :</i></p> <p>To what extent do healthcare professionals understand what their organisation's brand represents?</p>	<p><i>Umbrella questions :</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you explain to me in your own words what a brand is? 2. What does your organisation's brand stand for?
<p><i>Research Question 2 :</i></p> <p>How do healthcare professionals acquire knowledge and information to help them carry out their roles and responsibilities in accordance with their organisation's brand promise?</p>	<p><i>Umbrella questions :</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you give me an overview as to the type of information your organisation gives to its employees? How do you receive this information (eg., memos, email, newsletter, meeting and training)? 2. Can you give me an overview as to the type of information (feedback) that employees in your organisation give back to the organisation? How does this happen (eg., informal, survey, meetings, etc.)?
<p><i>Research Question 3 :</i></p> <p>What factors are considered by healthcare professionals to be necessary for them to successfully deliver their organisation's brand promise?</p>	<p><i>Umbrella questions :</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you explain to me how having knowledge about your customers' needs and expectations help you to know how to act in certain situations? 2. To what extent do you feel it is important for you as an employee to understand what has been promised/advertised in relation to the service you provide?

Table 3.1 Research questions and corresponding interview questions (umbrella only) (cont.)

<p><i>Research Question 4 :</i></p> <p>What factors are considered by healthcare professionals to be an obstacle for them to successfully build and sustain their organisation's brand?</p>	<p><i>Umbrella questions :</i></p> <p>1. To what extent do you feel it is important for you as an employee understand what has been promised/advertised in relation to the service you provide?</p> <p>2. We have talked about what the organisation advertises versus what is actually delivered — is there an obstacle that your organization faces that prevents healthcare professionals to consistently deliver the advertised promise and the actual delivery?</p>
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Furthermore, eight umbrella including about twenty key probing questions were developed to aid in the collection of data. The research questions and eight umbrella questions are shown in Table 3.1. For the interview technique, convergent interviewing introduced by (Jepsen & Rodwell, 2008) which enable researchers to determine the most important and/or underlying issues of the employees rather than a full list of important/issues in an organization. In this case, the interview technique should help bringing the employees' perceptions into the light. The interviews were audio recorded and written down for the ease of comprehensive and systematic analysis. The data also require interpretation and reduction.

3.2 Nan Ah Hospital

Nan Ah Hospital established in 1947 (Chinese immigrants commonly known as the name of "Num Ar Sui Ei ") to provide prenatal care and maternity services to the public, which operate from a clinic in the approximate size of three Thai design townhouses. During that time, most patients in Thailand were rarely gone

to public hospitals or polyclinics for medical care, especially for the Chinese immigrants who were beginning to settle in Thailand due to lack of Thai language literacy. Therefore, to provide the healthcare service, the medical team would travel out to set up a temporary clinic in the community area. Nan Ah Hospital operates as a family business. Thus, all staff members were trained to serve with sincerity as if the patient is one of their family members.

Today, Nan Ah Hospital is a private general health center with 30 beds to accommodate for patients' care. Dr. Bhotong Pangthuthipong has been the Director of Nan Ah Hospital for over 30 years. He has been the hospital's primary physician for many years before deciding to manage the hospital primary from the management level. During his tenure, he has turned the once provided pediatrics only to wider range of medical services providers including internal medicine, gynecology, pediatrics, surgical operation, orthopedics, and dermatology. Moreover, the hospital locates in Thonburi District, which is one of Bangkok's districts on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River. The hospital is aim to provide affordable pay-as-you-go healthcare and 30 baht healthcare programme for the residents in the district area.

The hospital core value serves as a compass for the employees' actions as well as describes how the hospital wants their employees to behave with the patients. Therefore, the core values are aim to provide genuine, affordable, and effective healthcare services to the patients. The genuine factor is to provide 'family-like' atmosphere while maintain the quality of healthcare by make sure the patients are well after visit with the appropriate treatment, preventing them from unnecessary return.

Nan Ah Hospital is a family owned business. The director oversees all operations as seen in the organization chart (Figure 3.1).

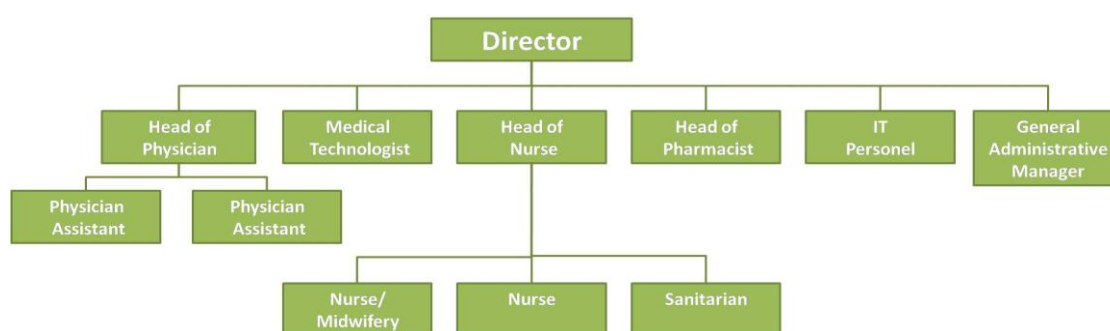


Figure 3.1 Nan Ah Hospital Organization Chart

3.3 Participation Selection

The participants for the in-depth interview are in for the total of ten employees from the Nan Ah Hospital. The positions selected are healthcare professionals which according to medical dictionary is “a person who by education, training, certification, or licensure is qualified to and is engaged in providing healthcare” (see Table 2): 1 Directors, 2 Doctors, 1 Head Nurse, 1 Nurse, 1 Manager, 1 Pharmacist, 1 Midwifery, 1 Physician Assistant, and 1 Sanitarian.

Table 3.2 Profile of interviewing participants

No.	Age	Sex	Tenure (yrs)	Occupation	Level: Mgr/Supervisor/staff
1	65	M	40	Doctor	Director
2	60	M	30	Doctor	Supervisor
3	59	F	32	Doctor	Staff
4	63	F	25	General Manager	Manager
5	63	F	25	Head of Nurse	Supervisor
6	40	F	18	Nurse	Staff
7	60	F	43	Midwifery	Staff
8	28	F	4	Pharmacist	Staff
9	28	F	5	Physician Assistant	Staff
10	40	F	18	Sanitarian	Staff

The nurses, doctors, and pharmacist including other healthcare professionals in similar positions are considered to be at the customer contact points that will communicate the brand value at the fullest. The remaining interviews will be conducted with the general manager and the director of the hospital. All interviews will conduct using the same set of questions, interview time at least one to one and half hour per person.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

4.1 Research Question 1: To what extent do healthcare professionals understand what their organization's brand represents?

In general, the majority of the participants were having a difficult time describe what the organization brand is, yet they have pretty good idea of what it stand for/represent. Since Nan Ah hospital is a small medium size business which they target the local patients in the surrounding area, the majority of the staff therefore do not fully understand the concept of branding due to the education level. To further explain, most of the staffs are working at the hospital for a long time. Thailand education teaching process three or four decades ago only teach about strictly to specific to profession specialty. Thus, the knowledge of management strategy was not necessary learning for the long time healthcare professionals as long as they were able to perform the task correctly and effectively. Nonetheless, the staffs have the general understanding what the organization's value of the hospital to its patients. When ask the director of the hospital this question of about what the Nan Ah Hospital brand is stand for/represent, the first thing he mention was to "serve the patients with the best medical practice, care, and other related healthcare technical." Moreover, he put emphasis on creating "family like service care provider" where patients come into the hospital and still have the same comfort ability much like when they are at home. Similar to what the director told me, many of the long time staffs understand the organization's value and continuously practice those values and deliver to the patients.

According to the brand scholar, a brand is a promise to consumers that the service organization will deliver on the care as promise. (Mangini, 2002) In the case of Nan Ah Hospital, though the healthcare professionals may not fully understand the concept of what is branding of the modern day knowledge and how to build one, they are able to come to the understanding of the hospital's value which is "family like service care provider." As well as maintaining that reputation in order to keep patients

to return and use the service again and again. The healthcare professionals at the hospital demonstrate that they are able to carry out the brand message to the brand reality with a close warm personal encounter to patients at all level of service similar to what the brand literature explain without full understanding of the technical terms.

4.2 Research Question 2: How do healthcare professionals acquire knowledge and information to help them carry out their roles and responsibilities in accordance with their organization's brand promise?

At Nan Ah Hospital, in relation to the way in which healthcare professionals acquire organizational knowledge for the purpose of carrying out their roles and responsibilities, the results revealed that the two strong subjects are customer information and work environment. All of the participants, except for the doctors, acknowledge that their hospitals give them the opportunity to be exposed to customer- and market-related information, whether that be in the form of customer feedback, customer initiatives employed by the organization. For example, something that many participants agreed on when asked whether there was regular communication to employees about customers and general organizational information, as one participant commented:

‘For once or twice every month, the staffs have meetings. They share information to the whole firm by getting together and talks about old and new customers. The meeting is really open for anyone who observes the customer’s need that we can serve better or general suggestion to the better serve customers. They talk about many different things — it is all put out there.’

The hospital management really supports an open dialogue of employees to share suggestion to improve the quality of service. Moreover, they also rely on employees to observe customer behaviors and make adjustment according to their needs. Moreover, according to the literature, to become a high-performing organization, it has to understand and orchestrate its employees. Thus effective internal communication is a key instrument use to influence employees’ brand

knowledge, attitudes and behavior. (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007; Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2012) Nan Ah Hospital incorporates the employees into their improvement plan when dealing with the patients that employees can make suggestion to what customer wants and needs.

Whether the organization was perceived to be attentive in the provision of information necessary for employee success, all participants have reflected on the significance of their work environment in helping them to do their job. The role of colleagues in helping the organizational socialization process was deemed to be important. In particular, making the transition from a new employee to a productive employee was very much dependent on the employee's work environment. As one participant explain that though the new employees have been through training after they were hired. Nevertheless, the training is mostly devoted to the professional practice rather than the brand building knowledge. Therefore, the colleagues who have been working for a long time will give suggestion and guidance to the new as they are learning their roles and responsibility as well as the organization's value. For example, the seniority colleagues will sometime observe the new employees of how they interact with the patients. Once they saw some situations that should be handling differently such as politeness while speaking to the patients. While the new employees were not intentionally trying to be impolite, but it was how they grew up talking and sometime it rub the return patients the wrong way. The organization's value at the Nan Ah Hospital is the key to brand reputation in which the patients keep coming back for.

On the other hand, for new doctors, they will receive the information directly from the director. The director further explains that in healthcare business, it is general understanding that doctors are normally very knowledgeable and smart. Hence, it can be a difficult situation for a nurse or a physician assistant to make suggestion about customer wants and needs including performing up to the organization protocol standard directly to the doctors. Thus, the director will directly communicate with the fellow doctors in the form of mostly an informal meeting to address any issues.

4.3 Research Question 3: What factors are considered by healthcare professionals to be necessary for them to successfully deliver their organization's brand promise?

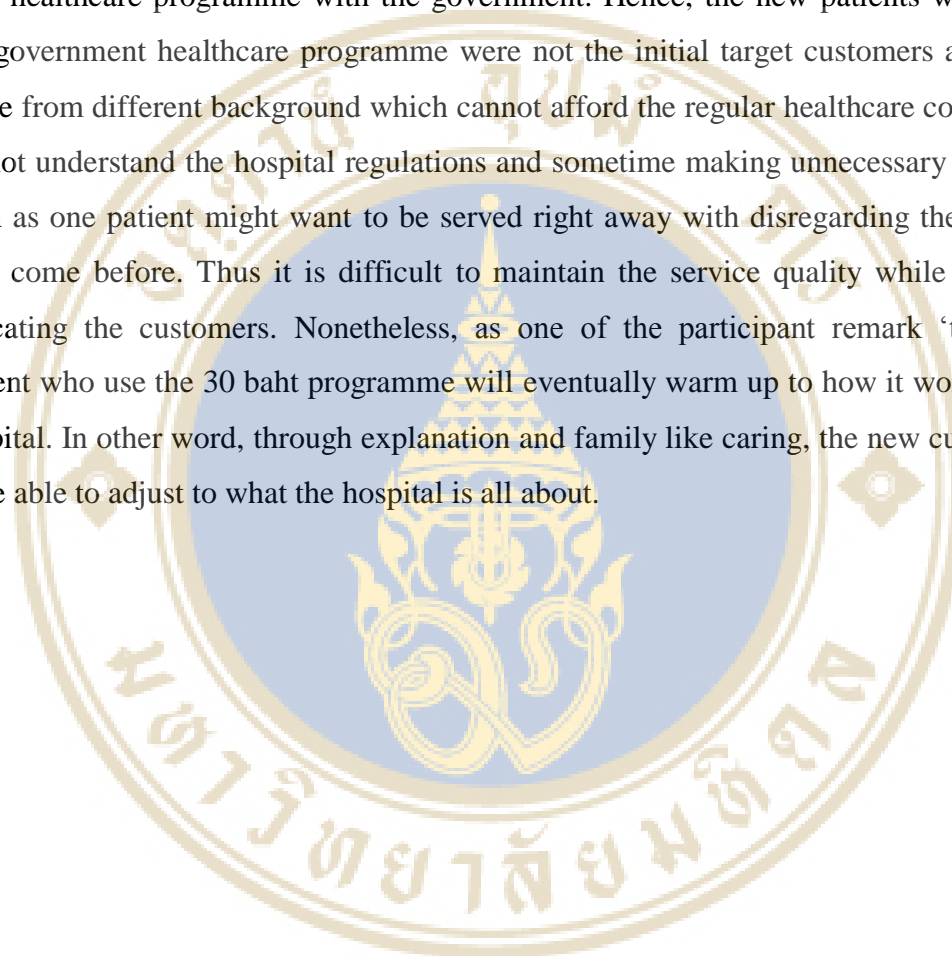
The results of the interviews discovered a number of factors that were considered by respondents to be vital reasons that needed to be present for them to be successful. Although the differences in the knowledge for each participant had about the organization brand, there is a common agreement what they perceive to be critical in order to be successful is the 'human factor'. In other words, participants overwhelmingly noted that receiving and sharing the up-to-date information about customers from management is important. According to the literature, employees who are in agreement with an organization's brand are more likely to demonstrate consistent supporting effort in how the organization's brand position to external publics perception as well as its services. At Nan Ah Hospital, the healthcare professionals also recognize the important of staffs. Thus the organization encourages open communication and listens to the staff opinion for improving the service quality. As such, it is only through the appropriate treatment of employees by the organization that such outcomes are likely to be realized. Therefore, as the previous comments indicate, simply giving employees information is deemed to be deficient to sustain and motivate employees build successful brand. Rather, the development mutually beneficial relationship between an employer and employee is advocated.

4.4 Research Question 4: What factors are considered by healthcare professionals to be obstacle for them to successfully in building and sustaining their organization's brand?

The recurrence themes that the participants (mostly long time employees) can agree on is how to maintain the service quality with the new employees and manage new patients. The new healthcare professionals were hiring as replacements or when new opening positions. The new hires take time to adjust to the organization's value which is the important part of brand building. The loyal patients used to certain

perception of the hospital which is part of the reason they kept coming back to use the service at the hospital.

Another factor is different type of patients can be another factors too. New healthcare professionals need time to adjust to what the current patients are used to the type of service they receive at the hospital and to the new patients too. One of participant explains that the hospital needs to expand the customer base by taking 30 baht healthcare programme with the government. Hence, the new patients who used the government healthcare programme were not the initial target customers and may come from different background which cannot afford the regular healthcare cost. They do not understand the hospital regulations and sometime making unnecessary demand such as one patient might want to be served right away with disregarding the patient who come before. Thus it is difficult to maintain the service quality while have to educating the customers. Nonetheless, as one of the participant remark ‘the new patient who use the 30 baht programme will eventually warm up to how it work at the hospital. In other word, through explanation and family like caring, the new customers were able to adjust to what the hospital is all about.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In today's highly competitive health care industry, branding can become a deciding factor when patients considered where they want to receive the healthcare service including Nan Ah Hospital.

This paper has shown that the case study of Nan Ah Hospital has brought fresh and new insight perspectives for HCOs in Thailand and to further explore the important of the role and responsibilities of the healthcare professionals in building a successful brand, including the potential common challenges that can be avoided when implementing the company brand building plan. The paper was aim on focused on the healthcare professionals challenge on building corporate brand. Therefore four research questions were developed to investigate the challenge to building the HCOs brand of Nan Ah Hospital. The brief summary from the research findings is shown below.

Research Question 1: To what extent do healthcare professionals understand what their organisation's brand represents?

The finding for this research question is most of the long time and current employees at Nan Ah Hospital did not the full understanding of the concept of branding due to the limitation of educational background. However, interestingly, they are able to carry the brand promise to the patients through general understanding of the hospital value to "serve the patients with the best medical practice, care, and other related healthcare technical," while creating "family like service care provider" atmosphere

Research Question 2: How do healthcare professionals acquire knowledge and information to help them carry out their roles and responsibilities in accordance with their organisation's brand promise?

Nan Ah Hospital incorporates the employees into their improvement plan when dealing with the patients that employees can make suggestion to what customer

wants and needs. Moreover, the role of colleagues in helping the organizational socialization process is deemed significant for making the transition from a new employee to a productively deliver brand promise employee which very much dependent on the employee's work environment.

Research Question 3: What factors are considered by healthcare professionals to be necessary for them to successfully deliver their organisation's brand promise?

'Human factor' is the common agreement from the participants as well as the management level at Nan Ah Hospital. Therefore, due to the recognition of the important of the staffs, the organization encourages opens communication and listens to the staff opinion for improving the service quality.

Research Question 4: What factors are considered by healthcare professionals to be obstacle for them to successfully in building and sustaining their organisation's brand?

The two important factors found to be the obstacles are how to maintain the service quality with the new employees and manage new patients. The new employees take time to adjust to the organization's value which is the important part of brand building. On the other hand, the new patients from the 30 baht healthcare programme may have to learn the Nan Ah Hospital value. This adjusting period could leave impatient customers to go to other hospitals.

It shows the importance role of 'human factor' can play in building successful brand – especially when healthcare professionals perspectives are seldom included in brand building strategy. From the case study, what distinguishes the hospital is that the director has shown willingness to include opinion of its internal stakeholders (eg. the healthcare professionals) to perfect the service delivering as brand promise. Nonetheless, its lack of solid brand building strategy and employees brand knowledge can hurt the continuity and consistency in delivering brand promise.

Nevertheless, the hospital case study demonstrated various limitations for becoming a valid example of building a strong hospital brand. It is a small-medium sized business, so some of the aspect of the findings may not be useful to larger size business. Also, the short researching time of approximately six weeks may not be enough to explore the deeper into healthcare professionals' perspective. For the

research method, though, the in-depth interview is suitable for getting to the insight of healthcare professional perspective. It might not cover all healthcare professionals due to its sample size, unlike the questionnaire method.

Therefore, it is recommended for the future researchers who aim to conduct their research in similar fields to investigate healthcare professional perspective from more establish hospitals where branding is more crucial factor in gaining competitive advantage (such as Bangkok Hospitals and Bumrungrad Hospitals.) Moreover, though, the qualitative research is popularly used for the research methodology by previous researchers, combining with quantitative research will give the future researchers larger sample size. Hence, they will perhaps discover more usable insights into brand building from HCOs.

The potential recommendations are provided for only Nan Ah Hospital can apply to its future brand management implementation plan to help its healthcare professionals to help the hospital delivers the brand promise to the patients. There were unanswered questions such as: are the hospital's healthcare professionals aware and understand of what the hospital brand stands for? Who is monitoring the hospital's healthcare professionals and how new employees can learn about Nan Ah Hospital brand stand for?

It is recommended that hiring a marketing specialist can help set the direction of overall marketing including the brand building strategy. In addition, the hospital should aim to develop and infuse its healthcare with the company values through initial training programs and constant promotion methods so that the healthcare professionals become advocate to the corporate brand. In the increasing competitiveness healthcare industry, developing internal stakeholders, in this case healthcare professionals in particular, can be the deciding factor of whether the hospital brand will successful or not.

The hospital can perhaps assign or open a new position to oversee brand management activities in the hospitals. Moreover, there should be hard copy materials that the current employees can refer to of how the healthcare professionals should conduct themselves (such as booklet manual of how to deliver the hospital brand, which may include common phrases to say for greeting and how to deliver the hospital brand).

In the increasingly competitive healthcare industry, training and/or team building for developing the brand are also recommended to accelerate and remind the healthcare professionals to carry on the “family like service care provider.” One of the options can be to develop in house practical training about brand building into the existing programmed for new healthcare professionals to learn and understand more quickly. Since brand coherence is difficult to achieve, continuity and consistency will be the keys factor to ensure brand promise is delivered at all time. For Nan Ah Hospital, the newly hired healthcare professionals should go through an induction programme that include segment of the hospital brand promise. Moreover, to show the healthcare professionals in delivering brand promise, it may consider creating introduction video. The trainers can use actual cases from past customers’ complaint or compliment to explain what it means to adopt the core values at the workplace, thus showing how these values can help healthcare professionals to communicate and live the brand promise.

In addition, as the literature review has suggested, brand building should not be left to one person’s responsibility, so all healthcare professionals and other employees should still need to be incorporated in brand building, led by the hospital director. Having healthcare professionals infuse the hospital core value will become crucial in delivering brand promise to the patients. Thus, even after training is over, the hospital should continue to promote its core values including the ‘family-like’ atmosphere such as posters with caring messages and graphics throughout the hospital for remind healthcare professionals as well as for new patients to understand the Nan Ah’s ways.

For further recommendation, improving brand logo can help with potential patients better relate to the brand value. Having an inspiring brand logo that can speak to patients will give a great advantage against your competition. The current logo (Appendix: A) of Nan Ah Hospital contains Buddhists chant words which encourage close familiarity among people encounter. However, in today setting, people may find it difficult to understand. The simpler logo design such as adding family-friendly design and keep similar message.

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