Branding on the Shop Floor

By Szilvia Gyimóthy & Louise Rygaard Jonas

Abstract

Service branding is a particular form of emotional management, where employees are regarded as adaptable media, who can be trained to convey corporate values while interacting with customers. This paper examines the identity work of butchers during the brand revitalisation campaign of Kvickly, a Danish supermarket chain. During the implementation of the "Best Butcher in Town"-project, Kvickly's shop floor becomes an engineered servicescape where the norms of good salesmanship must be performed. By documenting the disloyal behaviour of butchers, we demonstrate that the affective commitment towards corporate brand values is closely related with self-enactment opportunities of occupational communities. Total service-orientation threatens butchers' perception of autonomy and may therefore result in the emergence of resistant sub-cultures.

Keywords: Occupational communities, brand ambassador, Coop Denmark, affective commitment

Introduction

> Supermarket managers and employees should not be anxious about making mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes once in a while. The most important is to experiment with new things and to learn from our mistakes, so as to improve all the way. […] I firmly believe in people and therefore I'd appreciate a company where managers delegate responsibility to their subordinates and let them solve problems – within, of course, the frameworks of a supermarket chain concept. This is the main managerial philosophy that I will adhere to in my daily work in Kvickly. I believe in performing better as a team, as long as we, the leaders dare to delegate and if you dare to take responsibility. Responsibility for increasing our sales and turnover in every single supermarket.
>
> This does not mean that we will now have 82 individual stores in our chain. On the contrary, we must strive for a more consistent profile and uniform standards across all stores. The first task will be to ensure that the store lives up to the Kvickly '08 concept. Thereafter may the creative process begin. […] I hope that you will embark on this journey, where we think of motivation, inspiration, well-being and where we dare to delegate and take responsibility. It's all about the "good salesmanship."
> (Kvickly Kort & Kontant, internal newsletter, 2007, author's translation)

These were the first words of the newly appointed director of a Danish supermarket chain, Kvickly, inviting all employees to fortify the corporate brand. The senior management of Kvickly opted for starting this strategic process from the inside, that is, they intended to raise employees' awareness of the brand by creating a collective identity – prior to launching an external market campaign. The term "good salesmanship" in the newsletter above refers to the co-operative roots of ethical trading – intended to serve as an idealistic common platform for everyone across the organisation. The director appeals to employees to take pride in being associated with Coop (the supermarket "with a heart") as well as to take responsibility on all levels – from procurement to marketing and customer contact. Furthermore, besides the usual mantra of value-based emotional management, he also addresses the significance of the spatial context – "the store" as a stage – within which the creative processes and brand enactment may unfold.

Kvickly is one of five retail chains within the corporate brand Coop Denmark (owned by FDB, the Joint Association of Danish Cooperatives), and it has grown to be a problem child within the past decade. The retail market had became polarised along two essential competitive parameters: (low) price and (high) quality, and Kvickly found itself stuck in the middle without a clear profile and a red bottom line. Moreover, Coop, Dansk Supermarked and other retail chains in Denmark are increasingly identifying themselves as being a part of the service industry, which is perceptible in novel brand strategic approaches. The Kvickly '08 concept may thus be regarded as a reaction to contemporary market trends.

Since 2006, the strategic focus was to revitalise Coop as a master brand behind its five retail brands, including Kvickly. Internally, this entailed creating visibility around Coop's brand essence, "responsibility" as the *raison d'être* of the whole organisation. Responsibility furthermore embraces four core values, namely: care,

novel/creative thinking, honesty and influence[1] [omtanke, nytænkning, ærlighed og indflydelse], referring to the cultural legacy of the cooperative movement. The cooperative movement is entrenched in Danish collective memory; hence the internal campaign was deliberately connected to the authentic history of the small farmers' associations, building on Coop's ideals (supporting environmental consciousness, healthy diet and local products) as a differentiating parameter against other supermarket chains. A central aspect of the Kvickly '08 concept was to embed these values among employees so that they would perform accordingly in their daily work.

The Kvickly '08 concept also reinvented the frames for the customer-service worker interaction; including the revamping of the physical servicescape as well as the attitudes of contact personnel. Kvickly '08 included – among others – the implementation of "The Best Butcher in Town"-project, which intended to reconfigure the entirety of the butcher shopping experience, by grooming both spatial and employee "parameters", following the prescriptions of experience design (Pine & Gilmore 1999; Diller et al. 2005; Boswijk et al. 2007). Introducing such a performative space in a supermarket is relatively new, as it contradicts the whole notion of the self-service universe, where the traditional focus is on effective transactions of FMCG (fast moving consumer goods). In the past, employees – apart from cashiers – scarcely interacted with customers and the promotion of goods and advertising banners and displays conveyed special deals. Kvickly '08 was meant to radically change these practices, requiring *all* employees on the shop floor to foster long-term customer relationships. The newsletter above witnesses how executive leaders attempt to communicate a service-oriented culture by claiming delegation of authority.

The mastermind behind Kvickly '08 was the Marketing Department, and a cross-divisional "taskforce" – also including the Human Resources Department – was assigned with implementing the internal branding campaign. This entailed strengthening employees' affective commitment to the *corporate identity* and to initiate a cultural change resulting in a specific behaviour driven by the four corporate values. The challenge was defined as: "to turn staff into effective and proud service workers" by imposing the bread-and-butter of customer-orientation disguised in Coop's ideals of care, creative thinking and honesty. A series of internal training modules were launched to empower Kvickly's front line staff to become *brand ambassadors*. Cashiers and butchers were instructed to use their "common sense" in the service encounter, and even to initiate personal conversation to boost the customer experience.

Service branding is a particular form of emotional management, where employees are regarded as adaptable media, who can be trained to convey corporate values while interacting with customers. Arguably, internal marketing in a service firm is about socialising the individual service worker into an employee culture defined by the senior management (Schwartz 2004), that is, "to

change workers into the kinds of persons who will make decisions that management would approve; and to ensure predictable employee reactions in variable work situations" (Leidner 1993: 18). In other words, employees are domesticated (Parello-Plesner & Parello-Plesner 2005) to stage corporate identity consistently. Kvickly's shop floor becomes the space of pastoral subjectification (see this theme section's epilogue), where the norms of good salesmanship must be performed. The goal of this paper is to explore the implementation of a specific component of the Kvickly '08 concept (namely, "The Best Butcher in Town"), by documenting the reluctant identity work of butchers as members of a particular *occupational community* (Van Maanen & Barley 1984) and as disloyal brand ambassadors. In order to problematise this process, the analysis draws on both marketing and social identity theory.

Perspectives on Service Branding

Internal branding in a service firm may be approached from several theoretical perspectives. This section reviews the main tenets and commonalities of service marketing and corporate branding field, and concludes with identifying white spots in the management of emotions within a customer-oriented organisational culture.

Front line employees are recognised as strategic resources in market communication. Service marketing regards them as being part-time marketers (Grönroos 2007), and this field is particularly attentive to the link between employee commitment and delivered service quality as well as customer satisfaction. The corporate branding literature refers to employees as brand ambassadors or brand champions (Ind 2004); and the notion of "the living brand" envisages an ideal employee who internalises organisational values in her way of life. Hence, both fields advocate employee commitment and dialogue-based leadership as a key to achieving organisational goals – inspired by the managerial principles descending from McGregor's human relations school (McGregor & Cutcher-Gershenfeld 2006). It is argued that if brand visions are communicated to employees in the right way, these will integrate corporate values in their professional identity and will behave accordingly (Karmark 2005).

However, the normative ideals of employee involvement are rarely discussed through empirical examples, let alone, provide guidance in practical challenges. How do employees identify with the brand? How do they become emotionally committed? How to leave the idea of a factory of emotions, where brand meanings are delivered by human media (Hochschild 1983), and instead, foster a meaningful relationship between employee and employer with both parties equally contributing to a dialogue? Even though service marketing adheres to the ideals of dialogue-based leadership, the dialogue itself has so far received scant attention.

Within the past decade, marketing theory has been reinvigorated by the idea of a service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch 2004), which claims that value emerges during the service encounter and it is co-created between customers and front-line staff. Following this line of argument, service brand meanings do not exist *ab initio*, rather, they emerge as social constructions situated in a specific service interaction. Still, the branding process on the shop floor, describing how customers and service workers co-shape and actualise brand meaning, remains unrevealed. Corporate branding is an equally prescriptive field of marketing, yet, it acknowledges the paradox of organisational identity. As Hatch & Schultz (2002) demonstrates, perceptions of the organisational self (i.e., "who we are") held by senior managers and other stakeholders' (employees, sponsors or customers) may be divergent and even incompatible. In order to reduce these perceptual gaps and to align the entire organisation behind the corporate brand, executives are offered decontextualised toolkits. For instance, the *five cycles of corporate branding* describes how to develop and manage various phases of organisational identity (Schultz 2005). As these models are developed to serve strategic leadership objectives, they do not explain what role the corporate brand may play in the employee's identity construction. Neither corporate branding, nor service marketing, recognise that individuals produce their own understandings of social reality; probably because marketing traditionally deals with inanimate goods as brand media. Hence, internal conflicts and cultural change (which is not senior management-induced) do not exist in the world-view of services marketers. While it is well documented how a market-proof "corporate story" is conceived in the marketing department, still little is known about how the brand is connected to the daily activities of employees. Although there is a growing body of brand management literature which studies the symbolism and emotional relationship between individuals and brand meanings, the focus is exclusively on the identity construction of customers (see Fournier 1998). There have been so far no attempts to describe how service employees affectively relate to the brand and how does this relationship influence their professional work identity and job loyalty.

In order to explore the (missing) link between meaning in work-life and service brand management, we are informed by postmodern theories on organisational culture (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006). This allows us to view the organisation as a complex entity, consisting of diverse sub-cultures (Martin 2002). Viewed from this particular perspective, organisational culture and organisational identity are ongoing sense-making processes formed by employees as much as by middle managers and top executives (Ogbonna 1992: 75). Job position is an important part in the personal identity construct; hence the choice of workplace is often based on how well the corporate community matches one's self-image. As Salamon (2003: 24) notes: "Employees are no longer working for a living, but working to find identity" (our translation).

The commitment of individual employees can be pursued by interpreting specific behavioural patterns contrasted to what is deemed acceptable within an organisation (Schwartz 2004). But who sets the standards for acceptable behaviour? Within corporate branding, employees are deemed "disloyal" if their service performance does not live up to customer expectations or brand book specifications (van Rekom 1997). Nevertheless, as long as the employee-brand relationship remains unrevealed, so will the reasons for employee resistance and reluctance to become brand ambassadors.

Culture and Identity Work in Kvickly: A Methodological Statement

Our ontological point of departure for discussing employees' affective commitment is that of social constructivism, seeing individuals as active contributors to the social construction of reality. Hence, commitment can be approached from a relational perspective, as a sense-making co-shaper of organisational culture and sub-cultures (Wenger 1998; Weick 2001).

Our analysis will examine the occupational communities of butchers as a sub-cultural unit instead of individual employees. Occupational communities entail one's nearest colleagues, and the role performance of individuals are steered by what is socially acceptable within this group – instead of a formal and detailed job description provided by the Human Resources Department. Identification with brand values becomes affected by the extent to which sub-cultures may enact themselves within the brand framework. Disloyal behaviour makes sense; as a manifestation of resistance against the organisational identity claimed by top executives (conceptualised in the so-called culture/vision gap by Hatch & Schultz 2003). This notion is crucial for the methodological choice; the source of employee commitment or disloyalty must be found in the context of sub-cultures' self-presentation.

The analysis is based on a Goffmanian framework, and it seeks to understand how strategic alterations to a retail service brand change the work-life of a sub-culture in a retail organisation. The empirical analysis focuses on the identity work of Kvickly's butchers, a strong occupational community within Coop. Based on employee interpretations of Kvickly's operative codex, as well as enactments of the new Kvickly '08 service concept for butchers, this case will highlight and explain gaps between the corporate brand vision and the behaviour of butchers.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data presented in this paper is built on conversations with Coop's director of Human Resources as well as ethnographic interviews (Spradley 1979) with Product Area Managers and participant observation sessions with head butchers in Kvickly. One of the authors has listened to various internal presentations of the "Best Butcher in Town" project held for supermarket managers. Furthermore, the target group of this internal branding process, butchers, was followed for several

months in two different Kvickly stores. The empirical work was inspired by ethnographic methods to reveal what (de)motivates butchers to emotionally commit themselves to the brand and to the claimed identity ("Best Butcher in Town"). Our story of the butchers has been stitched together from observation sessions as well as informal chats by the cooling boxes or over the worktables. Before presenting the empirical material, we would like to set the stage by briefly describing the particular organisational context of Kvickly as a workplace.

Kvickly's Organisational Culture

On the outset, Kvickly's organisational structure follows a professional bureaucracy, where store managers control service quality delivered by their subordinates through the operations handbook "Rhythms and routines" [Rytmer og Rutiner]. At the same time, due to Kvickly's organisational roots (the cooperative movement), commercial operations are decentralised, and the ideal of "good salesmanship" is translated into the freedom to match local demand in procurement and offers. This leads to a more organic organisational reality, which is better geared at being customer focused. Kvickly is a typical example of a customer-oriented bureaucracy (Korczynski 2002) characterised by a management paradox: the organisation is steered along bureaucratic rules and procedures, but store managers adhere to a value-based leadership philosophy. This philosophy also entails that employee groups in various divisions are involved in the implementation of new brand strategies. According to theorists, such an approach may ensure affective commitment and identification with the company's corporate values (Schultz et al. 2000).

Cheney (1999) discuss the link between the interaction of organisational culture, structure and market conditions in the context of contemporary cooperative enterprises. Owing to its sheer size as a national retail chain, Coop Denmark faces problems in achieving cultural homogeneity, while market demands necessitate internal rationalisation and uniformity, bureaucracy and centralisation of certain decisions. The problem with increasing power centralisation is that the internal social dynamics based on historic ideals and culturally rooted democratic traditions will be lost in favour of operational objectives. In the struggle for a strong market position, Coop Denmark must balance between productivity and subjectivity as a competitive parameter, and the Human Resources Department should achieve this balance (Roldsgaard 2008: 7). Thus the HR department simultaneously draws on tools that make operations more efficient and productive as well as tools aiming at increasing employees' empowerment and well-being (ibid.). In addition to this double-edged sword, the HR department is now also involved as a strategic partner of training brand ambassadors, being in charge of entwining the claimed organisational identity with the self-presentation of individual workers.

The Status and Organisational Self of Butchers

For many years, the butcher department was functioning as a secluded workroom in the back-end of the warehouse, and as such, butchers have been physically isolated from customers and other employees. As they were not expected to service customers directly, they were allowed to adorn the "production hall" with personal items, for instance, by hanging "pin-up calendars with naked women" on the white-tiled wall. Butchers would work together closely around the cutting table (placed in the middle of the room) during the entire day, and they had came to know each other well by working as a team. They would use humour as a particular socialising tool, for instance, when an apprentice once cut steaks in different sizes, the whole group was "making internal jokes of him for some days". At the same time, butchers are segregated from the rest of Kvickly's staff, not only physically, but also temporarily – meeting at work earlier than others. One of them even claimed that "it is not natural" for other colleagues to enter the production hall. This isolation is further manifested in daily practices, where butchers leave early and do not feel responsible to participate in other operational activities in the supermarket. One of the butchers confesses that there is an asymmetry of contributions: "We butchers are a bit pig-headed, at least, I am. The greengrocer lady often comes by to help to refill the coolers, but the butchers are not very good at helping others in the house."

Creativity and craftsmanship skills are central to the performance of butchers. They often described a delight of producing "home-made" specialities, such as grill-sausages or goulash, which also underscores the importance of professional development in an apprentice-master relationship:"We have started to produce home-made salami here, because we are allowed to do that locally. And the apprentices really enjoy being a part of it."

Besides leading the butcher's department, the head butcher is also a member of the executive team and formally reports to the supermarket manager. However, this formal hierarchy has been neglected for years, owing to the professional skills and irreplaceability of butchers: "A butcher can always put cans on the shelves, but an employee on the floor cannot slice steaks". The formal authority of the supermarket manager was not respected; "It is less problematic to do without the supermarket manager than the head butcher for one day", and supermarket managers themselves would rather avoid daily dialogue with them unless it was necessary (i.e. unless turnover goals were achieved). In other words, the butchers' autonomy was in fact greater than they were entitled to in formal job descriptions. As Van Maanen and Barley (1984: 335) notes: "To the extent occupational communities succeed in convincing themselves and others that they solely command the expertise necessary to execute and evaluate their work, they gain autonomy and discretion."

The exclusive position of butchers had been radically changed between 2004-2006, marked by a rationalisation process implemented through the entire Kvickly

chain. In order to cut costs, many head butchers (being on the top of the payroll) were made redundant, and at the same time, "centrally packaged meat" delivered by Danish Crown was introduced. Instead of local production of ham chops, butchers were now in charge of ordering meat via the computer software, "Automatisk Disponeringsprogram", an activity that did not demand greater skills than basic IT-knowledge. As one butcher commented resentfully: "The new apprentices are quite good at computers, but they are bad at their craft." The traditions of craftsmanship were repressed in favour of efficiency (Ashforth & Mael 2004: 301); and work processes become standardised. A former head butcher commented this economising period:

> … Those smart calculations did not consider that being "a butcher" is a 4-year-long education. To buy centrally packaged meat meant that we were deprived of our craftsmanship. And it's not very motivating to go to work, when the only thing you do is to open cardboard boxes and put goods in the cooler.

The emphasis on the length of the education is a metaphor for the professional identity of this occupational community, which is a key to understand the impression management of "being a butcher' in Kvickly. Butchers clearly differentiated themselves from the 'employees on the floor", who follow a much shorter internal training programme. Along with the scale economic advantages of centralisation, butchers could no longer differentiate themselves from others by means of executing skilled work or significantly different daily routines. Professionalism was no longer a needed or acknowledged competence, which entailed that butchers have lost status compared to the rest of the employees whose abilities were compared "to those of a conveyor belt worker" (i.e. opening boxes and filling up the shelves).

   Furthermore, the length of the education was also a source of internal differentiation among butchers themselves. During the fieldwork, it became clear that there is a social stratification between "craftsmen" and "production people" – the latter referring to butchers taking their education after the introduction of centrally packaged meat. One head butcher saw this as a professional degene-ration (complaining, at one instance, about apprentices who were no longer able to arrange pork chops in the right order). These and other incidents are signs that may jeopardise the *impression* the head butcher desired to offer to customers about himself and his team (Goffman 1959). The emerging schism between "right and false butchers" shows a heterogeneous occupational community, characteri-sed by conflict and adversary intra-group images (Wenger 1998). Miller and Van Maanen (1988) report a similar heterogeneous sub-culture among commercial fishermen, differentiating themselves from non-traditional colleagues on the basis of their education and job contract. Hence, seemingly homogeneous occupational communities may also foster an internal social idealisation, ascribing uneven roles to different members *within* the sub-culture. Furthermore, it can be concluded that being an "authority" is a social construction rather than a formal and static organisational title (cf. Marshall 2000). For the head butcher, authority does not

stem from formal leadership qualifications (Ulrich & Smallwood 2007), but from the craftsman's skills, which used to be taken over by apprentices. The head butcher is (by Goffman's terms) a team leader, who must define and maintain a stable impression of his entire team, including staging the brand vision and coaching new members to perform accordingly. However, he feels set aside and claims that butchers will all be trained as "production people" in the future.

Our analysis reveals that the butchers' dis/identification with the Kvickly brand is partly attributable to their social self (identification with other butchers in their department) and partly to their role identity imposed by Kvickly. This role identity is not related to the self-image of butchers, rather, it is a generalised role (a butcher dummy) that the individual employee is expected to perform as brand ambassador. In the example above the head butcher distances himself from the new practice of ordering centrally produced meat, as it forces a new role identity onto him which is clearly in conflict with his self-image as a craftsman. He is dissatisfied with centrally produced meat obstructing the impression of a local butcher in front of customers, but more importantly, these artefacts may dismantle his status as an expert in Kvickly's organisational hierarchy.

Staging "The Best Butcher in Town"

Butchers were given a central role in the Kvickly '08 repositioning strategy. The vision was to rethink the store concept, daily operations and routines for the entire meat department. The claimed identity, "Best Butcher in Town" emanated from senior management and has radically changed the *communicative staging* (Arnould et al. 1998) of butchers' daily work. They were provided a new, common set of symbols, such as uniforms (consisting of a blue shirt, white apron, name tags and a bowler hat), a themed stage (a butcher's corner in each store, open towards customers), as well as new product brands accentuating provenance and quality (Bornholm Poultry, Premium Beef, Five Manors). These symbols were intended to generate an illusion (Hochschild 2003); *as if* the customer-butcher interaction was taking place in a small butcher's shop. It was believed that employees would find it meaningful to enact the local butcher as a professional self, and thus, they would be highly committed to representing corporate values when talking to customers. In practice, butchers were expected to deal with customers as if they were close acquaintances. As the corporate director expressed: "You are not buying meat in Kvickly, but from Brian". Knowing the butcher by his first name also suggests an illusion of intimacy with customers, and deep acting skills (Hochschild 1983) were emphasised throughout the project:

> During the "Best Butcher in Town" training we wanted to change the image of a butcher being a big, fat, surly guy hiding back-stage to that of a jovial person who dares to come out and meet customers. If a customer goes around and looks for a rump, then the butcher should approach him by saying (clears his throat): "I can see that you are interested in buying this rump. If you wish, just call me, and then I'll

clean and prepare it for you so that it is ready to go in the oven, when you get home." (...). The butcher should be able to find out what is going on in the customers' head when they walk into a Kvickly. What does the customer expect from this encounter, what do I expect? If they can be one step ahead and give them more than they expect, customers will be happy.

This excerpt is not only an illustration of the dramatic role shift (from back-stage productions to front-stage service), where butchers are supposed to impersonate the brand in the service encounter. The rhetoric question, (What does the customer expect from this encounter, what do I expect?) forces the butcher to reflect upon the task of initialising Kvickly's corporate identity starring the role of brand ambassador. Previously, customers had to ring a bell in order to invoke a butcher from his back-stage "cave", but now he is onstage as the servicescape is designated for customer interaction. Goffman (1959) discusses the link between the personal front (looks and behaviour) and stage, which, in combination may strengthen the impression a team or an individual wishes to make. Both the head butcher and an apprentice told us that the "live butcher concept" would enable them to better advise customers about preparation. They argued that they would be able to shape the sensory experience at the customers' dining table, instead of "just" striving for making an enticing visual impression (neatly arranged packages) in the cooling boxes. This line of thought rhymes with the concept of brand touch points (Davis & Dunn 2002), which maintains that customers' impression of Kvickly's service brand may not only be influenced in the supermarket, but also before shopping and during consumption at home.

Obstructing the Best Butcher in Town

In the supermarket where this research was conducted, butchers had just finished the fourth and final training module of the "Best Butcher in Town" and were admittedly positive about the concept itself. During their training period, they had become familiar with the new assortment of Kvickly products. The apprentices as well as the head butcher were proud of these products as "the best on the Danish market". They were also trained in customer orientation and reflected upon their new role on the stage: "we must think about how customers would feel about this" and, "we have learnt that customers would need 10 good impressions to put one bad experience out of mind." However, it soon became clear that focusing on satisfying the customer requires a dramatic effort: they must compromise their own views in favour of letting the customer be right. The confrontation between customer integrity and butcher authority may result in conflict. As one butcher recounted:

There was this man who complained about the Bornholm Poultry and compared it to an average chicken. I explained him that there were miles between a chicken from Bornholm and other poultry, because they are fed and bred differently. Then he claims that both were just as dry and he could not taste any difference. So I told him: "well, it's because you are not competent enough to savour **difference**".

According to Goffman (1959), a *face-to-face*-interaction between customer and employee is framed by two elements: 1) the information held by the two parties of each other and 2) a mutual understanding of (or agreement upon) "what is going on". In a face-to-face-interaction, both parties invest themselves in the relationship, weakening the conception of the self to arrive upon an agreement (ibid.). The new personal front of the butchers (e.g. uniforms differing from the other employees) was designed to underscore their craftsmanship, positioning them as more knowledgeable in the staged interaction with the customer. However, superiority is sat aside in an absolute customer-oriented logic: "Here, the customer is always right; you cannot tell him that he's an incompetent cook". The interaction to be played along the scripts of "Best Butcher in Town" is overruled by the ultimate customer authority paradox. However, the butcher in this case chose not to hold back his professional pride (wounded by the customer's critique of the Bornholm Poultry). Instead, he attempts to make an impression by sharing his knowledge about the product, expecting to reach upon an agreement (an acceptance of taste differences). Reading along a symbolic interaction framework (Goffman 1959: 3), the butcher's reactions are driven by the goal to make a favourable impression about himself and his profession, as well as to demonstrate that he has high thoughts about the customer – so none of the parties loose face (Goffman 1959: 18): "When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them."

The butcher invests a "part of himself" in the interaction in order to maintain a mutual respect (his own respect for the customer, compelled by Kvickly, must be reciprocated by the customer respecting his professional judgement). However, the customer's negative response bears no sign of respect, as he only focuses on his own sensory experiences ("both [products] were just as dry"):

> (He) acts in such a way as to destroy or seriously threaten the polite appearance of the situation, and while he may not act simply in order to create such dissonance, he acts with the knowledge that this kind of dissonance is likely to result. (Goffman 2004:36).

The situation collapses, and the butcher's retort (in Goffman's terms, "involuntary expressive behaviour") signalises his emotional dissonance (Hochschild, 1983). He creates a new act (a framework for the interaction) and changes tactics. The butcher redefines the power relationship (breaking the corporate spell about "the customer is always right"), to claim cynically his own superiority as a connoisseur of poultry tastes. He is no longer a cordial conversation partner, but someone who is recklessly resolute to save his own image, thereby loosing control over the impression he wanted to create in the first place.

This is not just one isolated illustration of how butchers think about customers' gastronomic expertise in general. One head butcher declared that given the excellent quality of Kvickly's meat products, the real reason behind complaints is

the insufficient cooking skills of customers. "However, we cannot tell that to the customer; they must get two bottles of wine and two extra steaks instead". This quote clearly refers to the gap between the façade butchers bear front-stage (the customer should feel that he is right), and their own true viewpoints. Butchers must now perform a double emotional labour in accordance with Kvickly's *display rules* (Hochschild 1983) – as a branded butcher dummy and a frontline service worker, they are engaging in both *surface acting* and *deep acting* (ibid.).

However, the Bornholm Poultry incident also reveals a different type of emotional labour. The butcher has, in fact, initiated the role he plays, in order to stage his professional self. As Ashforth and Humphrey (1993: 94) notes, "the service agent may naturally feel what he or she is expected to express without having to work up the emotion in the sense discussed by Hochschild". His sarcastic reply may be a sign of his "central salient and valued identity" (ibid.: 97); customer-focused on the surface, but a craftsman at heart. However, it may also be interpreted as the gap (disagreement) between the butcher's and the customer's expectation towards the service encounter. The "customer doesn't even know that there is a butcher in Kvickly, so it can be all the same" said one butcher. Apart from the material (substantive) staging of the concept as a butcher's corner, "The Best Butcher in Town" is not widely marketed externally. This leads to customers not reciprocating the interaction, because they simply do not realise the prospect of personal encounter on the shop floor. Hence, the proposition of temporarily delaying brand implementation (with internal communication preceding external campaigns, cf. Pitt et al. 1999) may have severe practical consequences for value co-creation in services.

Discussion: The Affective Labour of Butchers

Kvickly's approach towards involving butchers in the implementation of Kvickly '08 and in building a collective organisational identity is designed to appeal the butchers' preferred self-image ("Best Butcher in Town"). The professional pride of butchers is acknowledged as a strategic resource to get individual employees perform conforming Kvickly's brand goals. However, as exemplified by the snapshots above, butchers do not automatically become brand ambassadors, neither is there a unanimous script in the brand book, describing "how" to be a butcher. Our case reveals that butchers do indeed adhere to customer-orientation as a proper state of mind (cf. Hochschild 2003: 7), but there is a barrier when the butcher is implicitly expected to overrule his professional identity and to "draw on a source of self that [he] honour[s] as deep and integral to [his] individuality" (Hochschild 2003: 7). Hence, the daily impression management of the brand is a journey paved with hurdles of personal, social and professional development.

Ironically, some of the hurdles are created by the new training programme, which, besides communicating a common corporate vision, also intends to set

new standards for an already existing sub-culture. These directives dismantle the self-image of butchers as they do not take into account the historical and current social identity of this occupational community. Today, Kvickly is moving towards a service-oriented culture, from "skills with things to skills with people" (Mills 2002: 182). The mantra of "customer is first", including customer safety is seemingly a common goal for head butchers and top executives alike. Responsibility is signified by specific markers (such as "best before" – dates or centrally packaged meat), which simultaneously frustrate butchers, as they are at odds with their sense of autonomy. It is because butchers wish to protect their status that they deliberately "forget" to discard overdue products or re-order centrally packaged meat. The most significant barrier for the internal branding process is thus the fear of loosing grounds in the social hierarchy of Kvickly (and being downgraded to the level of unskilled conveyor belt workers). Consequently, the external demands of service-orientation threaten occupational communities' perception of self-control and may therefore contribute to the foundation of resistant sub-cultures (Van Maanen & Barley 1984).

Yet, customer orientation may only succeed if butchers' self-image is aligned with the designed impression created by the marketing department. In the service encounter, employees' self-reflexivity is an important condition of consistent communication of brand identity. Our case suggests that commitment is not so much related to the content of the job or job processes as such, but whether or not work processes make sense related to the self-image of butchers. The option to produce local specialities make sense, while centrally packaged meat does not, as these latter do not acknowledge the community's professional skills. The gap between Kvickly's vision of customer orientation and subcultural behaviour is also accountable to a terminological confusion. While Kvickly executives speak of service culture and service branding, butchers still perceive their workplace as a production universe. To facilitate butchers' performance along "the Kvickly way" requires, that the meaning of words like "expertise" and "creativity" must be explicitly associated with customer advising and culinary knowledge instead of production-based craftsmanship.

Conclusion

The most important mission of internal branding and affective commitment is not to impose corporate values onto individual employees but, rather, the managing of professional identities in groups (Sennett 2007). The study of Kvickly's internal service branding process revealed that it severely affects the identity of butchers. Occupational communities – their role and the status of their professional competencies in the supermarket – are central bricks in the puzzle of an organisational "us". The significance of individuals' actions on a workplace develops through the relationships they foster with others – and occupational

communities strive for power and status within the social hierarchy of the firm. As individual employees' behaviour are more related to their nearest work team values than that of the corporate identity, brand managers must deal with a differentiated culture consisting socially constructed organisational identit*ies*. This requires that internal branding must be approached more democratically; by acknowledging occupational communities *before* putting a top-steered strategic process into action. Affective commitment can be understood as a sense-making negotiation process between advocated brand values and the team's self image. Hence, the main conclusion is that the employee becomes a committed brand ambassador to the extent s/he – as a member of an occupational community – may strengthen his/her own ideal self-image and whether the occupational community perceives a high degree of self-control in doing their job. In addition, this conclusion confirms Sennett's notion (2007) of employees becoming less committed to workplace realities, which are beyond their control.

Szilvia Gyimóthy is Associate Professor at the Department of Culture and Global Studies, Aalborg University (Denmark). Her research focuses on deconstructing strategic communication in the experience economy. In particular, she has studied advertising and branding campaigns within tourism and services marketing. Szilvia holds a PhD from Anglia Rushkin University. E-Mail: gyimothy@ihis.aau.dk

Louise Rygaard Jonas is Human Resources project manager at Coop Denmark. She is affiliated with Copenhagen Business School, Department of Marketing, where her main field is corporate brand management and service marketing. She has recently completed her doctorate on internal branding in the Kvickly supermarket chain. E-mail: lrj.marktg@cbs.dk

Notes

1 Using the word "responsibility" signalises the general trend towards ethical trading and environmentally friendly products. Influence refers to having a say about consumption preferences and ultimately, affecting social trends in an "ideal" or ethically desirable direction.

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