



Strategic personal branding—And how it pays off

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Abstract Unlike companies or products, individuals possess intrinsic personal branding as a result of personality qualities, past experience and development, and communication with others—whether they know it or not. In this sense, every person already has a personal brand of some kind. The challenge is to manage that brand strategically. We offer a process for doing so, beginning with self-analysis. Then we review published sources and summarize interviews about the personal brands of 33 U.S. and European sales executives and managers, salesforce members, and professionals who sell their own services. The interviews indicate roughly equal emphasis on competence and personal qualities in creating personal brands, as well as significant interest in distinctiveness, and the respondents provide a range of examples of how personal branding pays off. This investigation leads to our basic recommendation: Follow a strategic self-branding process based on one's values and competencies, similar to the branding methods of companies and products, but with the understanding that personal branding will change as one's career advances.

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1. The reality of personal branding

“You already have a personal brand,” the workshop leader emphasizes to the room of attendees. Facing her are sales managers and executives hoping to add personal branding to their professional repertoire, as well as a mix of students eager to craft personal

brands alongside résumés on their path toward sales careers. “Everyone you meet has an impression of you, whether you're an MBA student, executive, or self-employed professional. It doesn't matter if you interacted with them on LinkedIn, over email, in person, or a combination. They have a specific impression of who you are.”

That impression can be characterized as an individual's current personal brand. A current brand is a starting point—an opportunity to develop an intentional, specific personal brand. To help readers both identify and move beyond this starting point, in this article we will: (1) help individuals understand how

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personal brands can advance their own careers and those of the people with whom they work, and (2) outline how to manage those personal brands to bring about career advancement. Our basic message is to match your values and competencies with the priorities of audiences that matter to your career, but you should expect to modify your brand over time given different audiences and different circumstances.

Diagnosing one's current personal brand means answering the question "Who am I?" in relation to external and internal constituencies. Describing oneself in a sentence may help in this assessment, as can asking, "What three words would someone else use to describe you?" The final step in personal branding is to compare these "Who am I?" descriptions to how one wants to be perceived in order to decide, if a gap exists, how to close it.

In this article, we begin our discussion of personal branding with a brief history of the concept. That history leads to an explanation of how to evaluate, modify, and manage a personal brand such that it complements the brand of an organization for which one works or aspires to work.

However, like all general prescriptions, this one requires reality testing. Therefore, we conducted exploratory interviews in Europe and the U.S. As shown in the Appendix, we set out to learn (1) why and how personal branding takes place, (2) how personal brands fit with organizational brands, and (3) how those we interviewed measure the effectiveness of a personal brand for themselves and/or their organization.

We interviewed individuals with sales-related roles because they appeared to be the most likely of any organizational group to focus on creating impressions outside the organization. Image and reputation matter for those who sell; as a result, we expected that their perceptions would be those most useful to individuals wondering whether they should encourage or discourage personal branding and how best to practice it themselves.

2. How the idea of personal branding developed

The concept of a personal brand has been attributed to consultant and writer Tom Peters (1997) in a *Fast Company* article. In one widely quoted excerpt, Peters insisted:

As of this moment, you're going to think of yourself differently! . . . You don't 'belong to' any company for life, and your chief affiliation isn't to any particular 'function.' You're not defined by your job title and you're not

confined by your job description. Starting today, you are a brand.

Since 1997, the concept has been adapted, enriched, and reinterpreted far beyond Peters's basic idea that an individual should want to be perceived as more than a set of skills in the service of an employer. However, in some instances, the reinterpretations have offered advice opposite to the spirit of Peters's message. *Fast Company* itself published the opinion piece "Me Inc.: the Rethink," in which Lidsky (2005) characterized self-promotion as difficult to apply and understandably unpopular with corporations worrying that personal brands will "battl[e] the corporate one."

Two years later, however, personal branding provided the core of *Career Distinction*, a book offering work-life advice. Arruda and Dixson (2007) addressed individuals in the same terms that marketing professionals have used consistently for businesses: You need distinctiveness to beat out the competition. The authors advised readers to figure out how they go beyond a conventional skill package and then focus as many impression-producing aspects of their professional life as possible on the brand they decide that they want to convey. Adapting the common insight that few buyers seek commodities, Arruda and Dixson (p. 7) wrote: "Being a Me-Too executive, manager, or professional doesn't cut it in the new world of work."

Arruda and Dixson saw deliberate personal branding as a necessity not only in a world of layoffs, but also in a world where employees start on career paths they may later regret. They pointed out that the self-knowledge that begins the personal branding process can offer a useful guide to career development, career rethinking, and career success.

Further, Arruda and Dixson observed that personal branding offers individuals the chance to create emotional connections with others, just as branded products can differentiate themselves from commodities via the emotional response they prompt in customers. Their book preceded that of Kahneman (2011), but offered the same guidance: Consider "How do I make people feel?" even in the supposedly reason-focused world of the modern organization. Ideally, personal brands evoke favorable emotional responses from coworkers, superiors, professional connections, and, of course, customers.

3. How social media fit in

When we view a personal brand as the totality of impressions communicated by an individual, an

immediate observation in our contemporary society is that many of those impressions must arise from social media. However, considerable variation exists in how such media are used.

For example, LinkedIn profiles may show an individual's job history, a few endorsements, and not much more. Alternatively, a strategically constructed profile may showcase a professional who encapsulates the brand of his employer through tactics such as prominently displaying his employer's logo, following his employer's organization, posting client logos, or posting wide-ranging company- or product-related resources. Another LinkedIn user may employ a different strategy to craft her personal brand on the network, focusing on her professional role by listing very specific endorsements, posting blogs and talks she has given, and listing the positions she holds as an officer in industry groups. Different users will vary in how they use their profiles to highlight their personal brands, as well as how much those brands will interact with the organizational brands of employers.

Also, individuals can promote each other's personal brands via social media. For example, someone who participates in an industry panel at a conference may ask a friend or coworker to take a cellphone picture or video and post it. That panel participant adds 'authority figure' as part of his or her brand as a result of that shared content from the original poster. Posting a blog that others repost or send to their own contacts serves the same purpose. Of course, one's online presence is not the whole picture; living the characteristics of one's personal brand, not just conveying them online, is a necessity.

4. Personal branding as a process

The points raised so far encourage a comparison between personal brands and organizational or product brands. In one sense, they differ: Company brands are created on demand while personal brands formulate throughout a person's development. Since everyone starts out with characteristics that create some kind of impression on others, then a personal brand must be developed or modified rather than created anew.

Personal brands differ from product-associated brands in two other respects. They can be more focused; a salesperson may develop a brand solely to target a set of customers at a particular organizational level in a given industry, whereas a product brand must communicate to shareholders, employees, and potential employees as well. Furthermore,

a personal brand is far easier to change over time. It may be developed in the hopes of moving up the organizational ladder, and, as that occurs, it may evolve with each rung. Buckingham (2011) asserted that themes for individuals come from their strengths as connectors, advisors, providers, and pioneers, a list that suggests possible shifts in a personal brand as one's role becomes loftier.

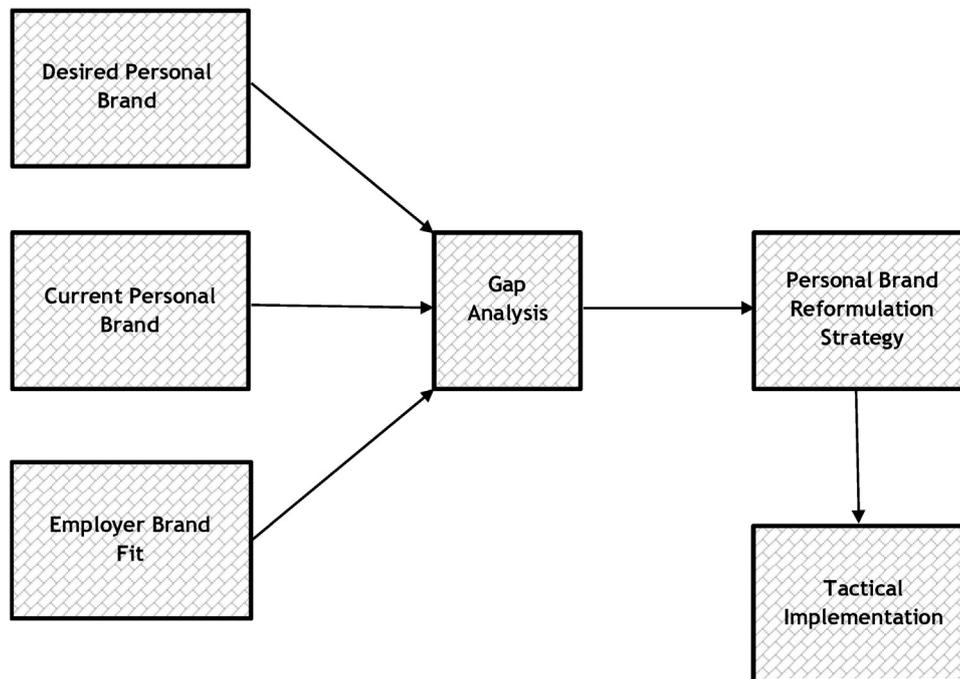
Despite these differences, the basic personal branding process resembles the branding process advocated for organizations or products in some respects. As shown in Figure 1, that process begins with a self-analysis: What do I value? What have I experienced? What am I good at—and what am I not good at? These core values and competencies influence development of a vision and mission. Similarly, for-profit and not-for-profit organizations construct branding by using institutional values and capabilities to guide future development.

Like the branding of an organization or product, the personal branding process takes into account intended audiences and/or marketplaces. What might appear to be a core competency as perceived by some audiences—such as a willingness to forgo an immediate win in order to build a long-term relationship with a client—might be a downside in the eyes of a sales manager frantic to reach a quota. Similarly, an analytical, number-driven skill set employed in talking with customers may be a welcomed quality by some and an anathema to others.

The important factor is consistency of the brand for a given audience. Starbucks customers expect a given drink on the menu to taste the same every time. Similarly, Starbucks executives expect to see their employees reflect corporate values consistently, in everything from the way baristas treat customers to the way store managers treat baristas. These expectations offer a guide to any actual or potential Starbucks employee. As is the case for a corporate brand, the next steps in personal branding entail considering what one's vision and mission suggest in shaping or revising one's brand and then comparing that desired brand to how one is perceived currently. Finding a significant gap can lead to closing the gap by changing one's behavior, whether the issue is an easy fix like professional dress or a large issue like trustworthiness. Leland (2016) described personal branding as not a series of big pushes, but instead an ongoing, steady stream of small efforts, including but not limited to social media.

If no significant gap exists, the logical advice is simply to monitor one's personal brand. One's competencies may change, and certainly the audiences of interest may change.

Figure 1. Personal brand building



A final step is to devise tactics that will expose a personal brand to desired audiences or marketplaces. Social media offer obvious channels for this. The best educational programs for personal branding ask each student to prepare and post a YouTube video presenting his or her brand. Creating the video prompts students to answer early-stage strategic questions. First, to what audience am I trying to convey what information? Second, within what audience—possibly the same one, but possibly not—am I trying to evoke feelings about myself?

The organization one represents or aspires to work for adds additional opportunities and constraints to personal branding based on the company's own mission to fill some marketplace need with a special differential advantage. Managers can help employees consider how to exemplify that same differential advantage. A company that projects a brand image as either particularly professional or particularly folksy, for example, offers clear self-branding direction. A company known for get-it-done-now efficiency wants individuals whose personal brands imply this quality: keeping strikingly neat desks, showing up 5 minutes early for every appointment, responding within a half hour to all emails, and looking the part of someone who has sewn up loose ends.

As these examples should make clear, personal branding can have far more dimensions than a corporate brand. Because they are created for mass marketing and mass image projection, corporate brands lack human dimensions and must rely on

employees to fill the gap. Despite this, corporate branding offers a valuable guide. At their best, corporate brands create value and reduce risk for others, using both information and emotional appeal to build confidence and build psychological connections—something personal brands can achieve as well.

4.1. Branding for an audience of customers

Customers are one consideration in crafting a personal brand for those who sell. Buyers are loyal to the organizations of people they trust, according to research by [Caceres and Paparoidamis \(2007\)](#). Personal interactions build that trust. Employees' personal brands thus become the critical face of the corporate brand, justifying concern about how they reflect the image the company wants to project ([Gelb & Rangarajan, 2014](#)). For the corporation, therefore, personal brands matter greatly in hiring decisions, since they will communicate the corporate brand to customers.

Customers evaluate how someone hosting their lunch treats the wait staff. Referral sources observe on LinkedIn the extent to which an individual's self-description emphasizes his or her current employer and what else it highlights. These examples just scratch the surface in showing how the personal branding of boundary-spanning employees may constrain or enhance the ability of an organization to brand itself successfully.

4.2. Branding for internal influence

Less frequently considered, but often even more important, is how a personal brand affects an individual's influence within his or her own organization. Salesforce members, for example, often call on the flexibility, the experience, and/or the willingness to go the extra mile of a wide range of individuals within their own organizations, whether it be to modify products, pricing, delivery schedules, trade show practices, or advertising. Likewise, any manager needs cooperation from others to work effectively, bringing internal considerations into personal branding.

Gaining cooperation is hardly the only internal consideration. Personal brands influence reputation, ability to sell ideas, likelihood of promotion, and relationships with superiors, subordinates, and peers. Wise managers will point out to those they supervise and mentor the importance of considering internal audiences in developing a personal brand. The truism that people buy from people they know, like, and trust also extends to informal help and formal evaluations inside the organization.

5. Listening to boundary-spanners

How does personal branding work in practice? To hear illustrative comments, we interviewed sales reps, sales managers and executives, and professionals selling their services in a diverse set of companies in Europe and the U.S. We asked 33 individuals, roughly half from each of those two geographic areas, whether they have a personal brand and, if so, how they created it and how it fits with the organization that employs them. Also, we asked for results they attribute to personal branding, and how they measure the effect of branding.

Interviews took place by telephone during the first 7 months of 2016. Those interviewed in Europe were recruited from a cross-national set of sales and senior corporate executives who attended workshops or were contacts of the senior author. Those interviewed from the U.S. were recruited from similar workshops, augmented by volunteers from a LinkedIn request to discuss personal branding. The posted notice asked for volunteers in sales, sales management, or professional roles requiring that they sell their own services. The 33 respondents we interviewed included seven consultants and one attorney, plus 25 individuals in sales, sales management, or marketing management. Seven were female and 26 male.

All but three respondents said they had personal brands. Asked to describe them, their answers fell

primarily into two categories similar to what [Neffinger and Kohut \(2013\)](#) described as strength versus warmth, what [Taylor \(2012\)](#) viewed as cleverness versus kindness, and what [Cuddy \(2015\)](#) saw as efforts to be respected and trusted versus efforts to be simply liked. While distinctions in this field can surely be blurred, personal brands were most often described as created either to convey competence, to build relationships, or—in some cases—both.

5.1. Categorizing personal brands

Fifteen of the 33 respondents articulated a focus on strength/cleverness/competence—that is, some trait that would evoke respect and trust. A professional who sells his own services commented:

I do it right and I do it right every time. When a prospect walks in the door, sometimes he'll say that a previous client used those words in describing me. Well, one reason is that I have used those words about myself to clients. That's what matters to them.

'Experience' and 'professionalism' were words often used by respondents to associate a personal brand with competence. Related ideas were gaining the trust of clients to help them reduce perceived risk. Both European and U.S. respondents often mentioned professional dress. A European executive said his personal branding "is situated around . . . cross cultural awareness, strong strategic thinking . . . an open mind, and a control freak."

Eleven other respondents described their brands as relationship-building, closer to the concepts of warmth, kindness, or simply good character. A sales vice president said, "I am passionate, enthused, and engaged. But I must appear to possess humanity and fallibility." A manager, referring both to his role with customers and within the company, said, "The Golden Rule is my brand." A business development manager commented, "I am a good networker."

A regional sales manager described building relationships by sharing personal information: "I'm a father and a family man, and I let customers know what's going on in my life because that way it's natural for them to share what's going on in their life." This method of establishing personal branding contrasts with the results of an unpublished European study, which tested whether 'social selling effectiveness' was greater when a salesperson mentioned his or her personal information as opposed to not doing so. The study found no difference in effectiveness ([Lerno, 2016](#)).

[Table 1](#) shows descriptions of personal brands from the 30 respondents who offered them. Most descriptions were longer than those shown, but this

Table 1. Descriptions of personal brands in Europe and the United States

<i>Emphasizing competence:</i>	
“Careful, vigilant, consistent”	(E)
“I dress the part, and check for grammar and tone of voice”	(E)
“A thought leader positioned to help the customer”	(E)
“My knowledge of the industry and the dynamics of the business”	(E)
“A solid bank account of credibility”	(E)
“The way I conduct myself”	(E)
“Formal, professional, and a trusted advisor”	(E)
“Cross-cultural awareness, open mind, and a control freak”	(E)
“I look like I know what I’m talking about”	(US)
“I highlight my marketing skills”	(US)
“Professional, communicating appropriately, dressed right, clean, calm, under control”	(US)
“I do the right thing every time”	(US)
“My brand depicts the impact I can make”	(US)
“I stress my experience”	(US)
“I insist on excellence instead of the latest ‘hot’ approach”	(US)
<i>Emphasizing relationship building, warmth:</i>	
“Passionate, enthused, engaged”	(E)
“A good networker”	(E)
“I’m a personality”	(US)
“Genuine and trustworthy”	(US)
“Integrity and a strong work ethic”	(US)
“Hard working, good relationships with people”	(US)
“The Golden Rule is my brand”	(US)
“My clients know me as a person”	(US)
“My brand is my personal story. I didn’t finish college and always wanted to be an entrepreneur”	(US)
“Happy-go-lucky team player”	(US)
“Former Marine, local guy, and a human being”	(US)
<i>Emphasizing both:</i>	
“Curious, empathetic, and competent”	(E)
“Professionalism and a personality that says this call will not be painful”	(US)
“Honest, fair, willing to look outside the box to solve problems”	(US)
“I stay professional with a fun side”	(US)

abbreviated list allows us to categorize brands by whether they focus on competence, relationship-building, or both.

In addition to projecting traits to be respected, liked, or both, four respondents mentioned an aim to be distinctive or memorable. One sales executive described his brand as a self-differentiating toolkit. A consultant explained how he traditionally wore a hat when doing business to communicate distinctiveness. A software salesperson went far further, though, in exemplifying self-differentiation as her personal brand. She described herself as wearing “\$5 pink tennis shoes.” Then she recounted how she once found herself in the office of a prime health-care clinic prospect:

I baked a big chocolate cake, wrote “Will you see me?” on the top in icing, got to the waiting room early, and made sure he saw it when he came in. He laughed and said “That’s the only way you’d have gotten in to see me.”

Not all the women we interviewed, however, identified self-differentiation as their branding approach. Two mentioned that one focus of their brand was to fit into a man’s world, to compete successfully with their male counterparts.

A Marine Corps veteran described a significantly different personal brand based on military service. He walked into the office of a prospect company and saw on the receptionist’s desk a piece of outgoing

mail with the Corps' insignia. When he asked if it was hers, she mentioned the name of an ex-Marine executive in the company. "I'd like to meet him and thank him for his service, for paving the way for us who served recently," he said. True to his word, when the meeting took place he made no mention of his company or product, but, unsurprisingly, subsequent conversations initiated by the executive led to a large order.

5.2. Using social media for personal branding

Social media channels initially appeared likely to be key to personal branding approaches, but about half of those we interviewed in the U.S. said that face-to-face communication mattered far more. However, almost all the European respondents valued social media greatly, particularly LinkedIn; two sales executives said that without an online presence "you don't exist." In both Europe and the U.S., several individuals commented on the importance of keeping online information up to date. However, some saw thoughtless or irrelevant posts on social media as a potential threat to one's personal brand; these respondents mentioned scrupulously avoiding mention of partying, politics, or "anything controversial."

5.3. A fit between personal and corporate brands

How does one's personal brand fit with the organizational brand? We asked respondents to give this question careful thought. Could the personal brand overshadow the corporate brand? Would the corporate brand constrain the possibilities for personal branding? How could fit between the two be operationalized?

For most respondents, fit seemed to be taken for granted. "If you work for a staid financial services firm, you don't show up with purple hair," commented a U.S. consultant. In contrast, some individuals thought personal branding offered an opportunity to broaden the corporate brand. A U.S. sales manager noted: "Our company has to be serious and numbers-oriented and careful; we're in a regulated industry and deal with hazardous materials. So it's up to me and my team to add a little bit of fun. That's part of my brand."

For most European and some U.S. respondents considering the issue of fit, the potential for damage to the corporate brand dominated their consideration. They worried about harm that could come to the corporate image if postings by employees on social media antagonized customers or other

stakeholders. Small firms were mentioned as particularly vulnerable to having someone whose brand was a poor fit offer an opinion or project an image that countered the brand image that the company sought to project.

One European business development expert found the whole idea of a personal brand to be a mixed blessing for company brands. He described his organization's best salesperson as a personal brand-builder, well known and adept at hitting his targets. However, he envisioned that such a person might take part in conferences, start to share his own opinions, and "if they stray from the company message, then it is time to divest the personal brand."

6. Managing the personal brand

Managing a personal brand appears to have at least two dimensions: (1) keeping it up to date given changing circumstances and (2) measuring its effectiveness. The individuals we interviewed mentioned the dynamic character of personal brands without our prodding, but the idea of measuring effectiveness was one they considered only in response to a direct question on that topic.

6.1. Adapting a personal brand over time or circumstances

Comments on the chameleon nature of a personal brand were common. However, several individuals said their brand evolved not because of shifting circumstances, but because "I could see that what I was doing wasn't working, so I changed it." One sales representative had a clear description of that process:

I was in my mid-20s, and I was always the guy with the joke. Now I'm in my early 30s and I'm a family man and father—that's my brand. I offer serious advice about a big-dollar commitment. So I'm not the guy with the joke.

6.2. Measuring the effectiveness of personal brands

About half the respondents offered specific answers when asked how they measure the success of their personal brand. [Table 2](#) categorizes answers as tangible, which most were, as well as those intangible/less concrete. Several measures of effective personal brands mentioned "how quickly are your calls answered" or "when you lose your job how quickly do you get another one." Others were

Table 2. Measuring the effectiveness of a personal brand

<i>Tangible measures</i>
How quickly customers return your phone calls
How easy it is to get appointments with prospects
On LinkedIn, whether you are trending up or down
When you lose your job, how quickly you get another one
How many referrals come your way
Your sales results
How much repeat business you get
How often you are referenced and quoted
Promotions
The same way you measure the value of your corporate brand
If you make more money in sales than the salary of the CEO
Money my clients saved because they used my services
Accolades, awards, and trips
<i>Intangible measures</i>
People like working with you
You get compliments
You humble yourself and ask your boss and mentors how you're doing
Your client smiles when he/she sees you

variations on sales success—referrals, repeat business—or variations on client success to which the respondent's organization contributed.

Intangibles were offered as well. One sales manager, asked how she measures the effectiveness of her personal brand, used an anecdote:

My supervisor sent me an email about a suggestion I had made. He said "I like it, so I'm sending it up the chain to my vice president." And then he added, "I knew you were the right person for this job."

Another response encapsulated the value of a personal brand: A sales representative thought a minute about how he measures its effectiveness and then said, "My client smiles when he sees me."

7. Recommendations for personal branding

Working from interviews intended to be only exploratory, we hesitate to generalize from our results. However, with the caution that we interviewed a small, non-random set of individuals, we did learn that strategic personal branding, intentionally

matching values and competencies with the priorities of one's organization and one's customers, can pay off. That result leads to four recommendations.

7.1. Balance respect-building and relationship-building

Our first recommendation arises from the fact that those we interviewed created personal brands more often to demonstrate competence than to build relationships, but few set out to do both. We believe that ideally a personal brand should offer both of these pathways to success.

Focusing on one or the other is understandable. For those who currently emphasize only competence—or only relationship-building—it may be natural to recall triumphs based on one's current brand and assume that it is therefore optimal. However, we advise managers, executives, professionals marketing their services, and students seeking such roles to consider broadening their personal brand. Doing so, after all, means broadening one's own set of strengths. Organizations and MBA programs both may want to offer coaching on how to proceed.

7.2. Bolster personal branding with organizational supports

A second recommendation concerns the need for organizations and educators to consider all the roles they might play in personal branding. One respondent waited until we concluded his interview, then asked: "Why isn't my company asking me these questions?" We note that companies may have dress codes, policies concerning on-the-job smoking, drinking, or talking to the press, and very likely policies on social media use. However, because all of these issues are subsets of personal brands, managers might want to use that term, ask employees how they can be helpful, then offer coaching and sensitize employees to the realities of aligning personal and corporate brands. MBA programs can do the same.

At the same time, it seems wise to recognize that a personal brand is just that—personal—and may be valuable not only as a route to success but also as a fallback after job loss or as a path to career flexibility. Thus, personal branding is both a marketing issue and a human resources issue, and any survey or policy should incorporate both perspectives. While managers may learn a great deal from asking employees about their personal brands, they may also want to interview customers or clients, asking them to describe the personal brands of the company representatives with whom they work.

7.3. Embrace flexibility

Third, we recommend flexibility when considering the relationship of personal brands and the corporate brand. While conflict between the two will help neither the individual nor the company, personal brands can enrich and stretch the corporate brand and should be encouraged to do so. A regional sales manager recounted an attempt to sell into a billion-dollar company for the first time. He said, “The reputation of our company got us an appointment, but then it was up to two of us to build the relationship that would lead to the first order.”

Flexibility rather than uniformity in the branding of employees can prove useful in another way. A manager with more sophisticated understanding of personal branding can strategically approach diverse personal brands of employees. Sales teams are often developed based on complementary skill sets, but can also be developed to juxtapose complementary personal brands. One team member may display the kinds of brand characteristics that in [Table 1](#) we label as emphasizing competence, while another displays those we label as relationship-building. While it would be desirable for one individual to excel in both dimensions, efforts to see that a team does so can produce the same outcomes.

7.4. Measure, assess, and adapt brands over time

Finally, we suggest that individuals measure the effectiveness of their personal brands and modify them when necessary. Managers can encourage employees to evaluate their brand and can set up systems for the organization to do likewise. For salespeople, decreases in order sizes will prompt attention, but a decrease in referrals or even followers on social media may not. If such responses to a personal brand are perceived as valuable, tracking them becomes part of good management. Even the ability to gain a premium price can be a measurement of the effectiveness of a personal brand.

Likewise, astute managers will recommend monitoring internal indicators of skillful personal branding. If employees fail to achieve cooperation or to progress in the organization, it may be easier and more effective to discuss such failings in the context of personal branding rather than personal deficiencies. Changes to personal branding are more easily coached and encouraged. Organizations can help any employee by pointing out that he or she has what amounts to a workplace identity and that, like any brand in the marketplace, it needs to be formed strategically, using a process like the one described

here, but also frequently evaluated—and sometimes improved.

8. Personal branding in the long run

Despite differing opinions around the topic of personal branding in recent years, the perspective that we adopt here—that everyone has a personal brand as a result of first impressions, personality traits, communications with others, and more—behooves all of us to address the status of our own personal brands. Does the brand you currently have communicate the right message? How can it be refined? How does it fit with your employer’s organizational or product brand?

Beyond the need for individuals to monitor and moderate their own personal brands, companies need to be prepared to address employee personal brands in ways other than defensively. For the sake of both company and workforce fulfillment, managers should be prepared to support employees in developing personal brands that benefit both the individual and the overarching organizational brand. In the long term, personal brands and company brands need not battle against each other, but can find ways to support each other to achieve mutual benefit.

Appendix. Question guide for interview

Name:
Company:
Function:

1. If I use the term ‘personal branding,’ what comes to your mind?
2. Briefly, how would you describe your personal brand?
3. Some of the people I’ve talked to associate personal branding with increasing usage of digital channels like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, etc. Do you? If so, what have you done in the use of those channels to communicate your personal brand?
4. How did you decide what your personal brand should say about you?
5. How does the personal brand of an individual fit with the brand of their company? Under what conditions might it overshadow the corporate brand? How does the corporate brand affect the personal brands of its boundary spanners?

6. Do you have an example of how personal branding has actually helped achieve organizational results?
7. How do you measure the effectiveness of your personal brand?

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