Exploring the Impact of Organizational Silos on Brand Consistency

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Abstract

Brand consistency, the seamless delivery of a brand promise across all touchpoints, is essential for reinforcing a firm's identity and establishing unique positioning. Consistent branding hinges on internal brand alignment beyond mere understanding, but in the integration and translation of the brand's core values into actionable behaviors across touchpoints. However, the presence organizational silos can challenge the mechanisms needed to achieve effective brand alignment. Through leveraging a single firm setting, this study investigates how organizational silos manifest within an organization, their effects on internal brand alignment, and how alignment, impacted by silos, influences overall brand consistency. Despite having a well-established brand and internal cultural alignment, various process barriers contribute to siloed information flow. This fragmented knowledge creates disjointed perceptions of brand responsibility, leading to inconsistencies in brand enactments across touchpoints. Consequently, a misalignment emerges between the brand's aspirational image and its actual day-to-day delivery. By highlighting the influence of process barriers on brand consistency, this research contributes to the understanding of the challenges faced by siloed organizations.

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Resumo

A consistência da marca, a entrega perfeita de uma promessa de marca em todos os pontos de contacto, é essencial para reforçar a identidade de uma empresa e estabelecer um posicionamento único. A consistência da marca depende do alinhamento interno da marca, além da mera compreensão, mas da integração e tradução dos valores fundamentais da marca em comportamentos acionáveis em todos os pontos de contato. No entanto, a presença de silos organizacionais pode desafiar os mecanismos necessários para alcançar um alinhamento eficaz da marca. Ao aproveitar o ambiente de uma única empresa, este estudo investiga como os silos organizacionais se manifestam dentro de uma organização, seus efeitos no alinhamento interno da marca e como o alinhamento, impactado pelos silos, influencia a consistência geral da marca. Apesar de ter uma marca bem estabelecida e um alinhamento cultural interno, várias barreiras de processo contribuem para o fluxo isolado de informações. Este conhecimento fragmentado cria perceções desconexas de responsabilidade da marca, levando a inconsistências nas ações da marca em todos os pontos de contacto. Consequentemente, surge um desalinhamento entre a imagem aspiracional da marca e a sua entrega real no dia-a-dia. Ao destacar a influência das barreiras de processo na consistência da marca, esta pesquisa contribui para a compreensão dos desafios enfrentados por organizações isoladas.

Título: Explorando o impacto dos silos organizacionais na consistência da marca

Autora: Ana Olivia de Gannes

Palavras-chave: consistência da marca; silos organizacionais; marca interna; barreiras de processo

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Acknowledgement of AI: In completing this dissertation, I utilized Google Gemini, a large language model, with the sole purpose of rephrasing and refining the flow and tone of certain sentences. This technology helped to ensure clear and concise communication of my original ideas.

List of Abbreviations

B2C – Business-to-consumer

B2B – Business-to-business

ITI – Iterative thematic inquiry

RIA – Registered investment advisor

AUM – Assets under management

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1 Introduction

Brand consistency, the seamless delivery of a brand promise across all touchpoints, is essential for reinforcing a firm’s identity and establishing unique positioning. Consistent branding across all internal and external touchpoints enables a unified experience as stakeholders come to associate a brand with a strategic set of defining values and messages.

Consistency between the brand promise and brand delivery hinges upon internal alignment on awareness and engagement with the brand. De Chernatony and Cottam (2006) posit that a strong internal consensus on brand meaning is crucial for an organization to achieve brand success (De Chernatony and Cottam, 2006). Beyond mere understanding, brand consistency requires integration and translation of the brand's core values into actionable behaviors across organizational touchpoints.

De Chernatony and Cottam (2006) further suggest that organizations which achieve strong, successful brands demonstrate an integrated approach to internal brand management. Thus, internal branding serves as a valuable source of differentiation. However, a challenge to the effective attainment of internal alignment lies in achieving collaboration across the organization and a shared willingness to exercise brand-related efforts (Burmann et al., 2009).

In practice, it is difficult to achieve a shared mindset across an entire organization when striving for brand consistency (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013). Today, organizations are marked more by group isolation and conflict than by interdepartmental consistency, likely complicating branding efforts beyond what existing literature suggests (Wallpach & Woodside, 2009). While existing research emphasizes the importance of alignment around the brand to strengthen a shared identity, it often overlooks the influence of silo-driven barriers on the effective understanding and internalization of brand values (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013).

Aaker (2008) argues that the presence of organizational silos creates collaboration and communication barriers that hinder effective marketing implementation. Existing research limitations motivate the pursuing study, specifically gaps in understanding how silos impede effective interpretation and operationalization of brands across organizational touchpoints. While some have explored the impact of silos on achieving brand orientation from the onset of a brand (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013), little is known about the impact of silos on attaining consistency within established brands.

This dissertation aims to contribute to the understanding of how organizational silos affect overall brand consistency. Leveraging a single firm setting for this study, the goals of this research are to explore how silos manifest within a specific organization, the subsequent effects of these silos on internal brand alignment, and ultimately how internal alignment, impacted by silos, influences overall brand consistency.

By uncovering these interconnected aspects, this research finds that process barriers, rather than cultural fragmentation, drive silo formation, hindering internal brand understanding and overall consistency. While employees value the brand, siloed information flow creates disjointed brand responsibility, leading to variations in brand enactments across the different external touchpoints.

2 Theoretical Discussion

2.1 Understanding Organizational Silos

Silos arise within organizations where there is separation of members into isolated groups based on areas of expertise, training, process, and responsibilities. While organizational silos may be regarded as efficient structures for executing specialized functions (Kleinbaum et al., 2008), they often "lack coordination that is not only sufficient, but which is necessary for cross-functional interdependencies" (Bento et al., 2020). When actions arise that require cooperation across departments, these silos pose a challenge (Briody & Erickson, 2014).

Existing literature perpetuates the idea that silos diminish productivity, efficiency, and morale across an organization, and that in order to resolve said challenges, these constructs need to be deconstructed or reorganized. The silo mentality typically indicates an absence of systems thinking and holistic foresight across functional groups, whereby there exists inconsistent perceptions of organizational-wide goals, values, identity, and strategic direction. Such inconsistencies translate to communication and collaboration barriers, which limit activities that enable cross-silo linking behaviors, such as exchanging information, ideas, tools, and other resources essential for organizational success. (Bento et al., 2020).

Cilliers and Greyvenstein (2012) theorize organizational silos as possessing dual identities: they are described both as invisible barriers and as containers. The former perspective suggests that silos are not physically present within the organization but are rather constructed within the collective consciousness of employees, serving as both a defense and safety mechanism against other parts of the organization. This fosters an "us vs. them" attitude. The latter perspective views silos as enclosed environments that encourage groupthink and a shared identity. Hence, a silo mentality considers the organization as a collection of separate parts with distinct cultures, rather than as an integrated whole (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009).

In the absence of mechanisms facilitating linking behaviors, there tends to be little motivation for collaborative efforts between silos. The act of sharing information with other departments not only demands time and resources but also carries the risk of facing execution obstacles, even in potentially beneficial cross-silo collaborations. A silo mentality can lead silo members to view enhancing the performance of other groups as reducing their own importance (Aaker, 2008). Without considerable motivation for cross-silo collaboration, organizations are left to bear high costs of duplicated efforts and inefficiencies (Serrat, 2010).

It is argued by Lencioni (2006) that silos typically form not as a result of conscious action by leaders, but rather due to their oversight in providing employees with a compelling context for collaboration. Organizations that excel in breaking down silo barriers and reducing conflicts between departments are those that effectively communicate the importance of interdependencies across the organization. Successful organizations foster a culture that not only encourages cross-departmental collaboration but creates institutionalized expectations for it (Briody & Erickson, 2014).

Precursing the ideas of Cilliers and Greyvenstein (2012), Lencioni (2006) distinguishes silos as cross-departmental barriers which lead individuals who are supposed to collaborate to instead work in opposition. The author proposes a four-step model to address silo issues which consists of interdependent components: a thematic goal, a set of defining objectives, a set of standardized operating objectives, and suitable metrics. The model adopts a leadership-based approach for addressing and mitigating the silo effect, as the author claims that the root cause of silos can be attributed to the actions, or lack thereof, of an organization's leaders.

Firstly, the author advises establishing a thematic goal, a singular priority with a defined timeline that is shared by all leaders throughout the organization, regardless of their functional departments. This must then be accompanied by a set of defining objectives. That is, what must be done to accomplish the thematic goal. The defining objectives serve as the foundational elements of the thematic goal, are also time-bound, and shared across the entire leadership team (Lencioni, 2006)

Next, establishing standardized operational objectives allows leaders to focus on areas that are not necessarily linked to the thematic goal. Operational objectives should remain consistent from one period to another. Lastly, the author emphasizes the significance of setting appropriate metrics to measure the success of the aforementioned goal and objectives. This is essential for enabling individuals to understand how their roles contribute to the organization's goals in a broader context (Lencioni, 2006).

A scoping review by Bento et al. (2020) identified significant variation in how organizational silos are defined and operationalized, highlighting the fluidity of the concept (Bento et al., 2020). The review suggests Bandura's (1978) model of triadic reciprocal determinism as a suitable framework for analyzing the silo effect within organizations. This model postulates the interdependence of cognitive/personal, environmental, and behavioral factors in shaping the "interactive functioning of organizational and social systems", specifically organizational behavior (Bandura, 1978).

Bento et al. (2020) further propose that silos may be viewed as influencing these factors. Cognitive factors (knowledge, expectations, and attitudes) are linked to silo processes, environmental factors (culture, access within the organization, and influence on external or social environment) are linked to silo structure, and behavioral factors (skills, practice, and self-efficacy) are linked to silo function.

Applying the framework of this model illustrates how a lack of connectivity and collaboration across silos affect the entire organizational system. The authors emphasize that this framework considers the interdependency of individual (siloed) behavior, organizational culture, and organizational goals. Specifically, it examines how silo behavior shapes organizational culture, how culture in turn influences silo behavior, and finally, how both culture and silo behavior can either impede or facilitate the achievement of organizational goals (Bento et al., 2020).

2.2 Subcultures among Silos: Barrier to Brand Consistency

Martin (1992) points to the differentiated and fragmented perspectives of organizational culture to offer insight into the diverse subcultures associated with silos. Silos may give rise to unrelated cultural diversities throughout the organization, particularly in the absence of linking behaviors and activities that encourage collaboration (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013).

Expanding on these insights, further research has recognized a common issue: the weakening of brands due to a lack of cultural consistency and the existence of multiple diverse subcultures, as observed by de Chernatony and Cottam (2006). Thus, cultural incongruence directly impacts the effectiveness of an organization's brand strategy, as well as the degree to which it successfully reaches the end consumer as promised (Bento et al., 2020). This underscores the importance of considering internal alignment between brand values and the values of various subcultures when undertaking efforts to drive brand performance (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013).

An effective brand strategy relies on an organization's shared sense of identity to deliver a seamless brand experience (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013). However, the presence of siloed groups within an organization, each with its own set of values and culture, challenges the coherence of its internal identity (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005). Siloed groups tend to interpret organizational brand values in a way which best aligns with their own group identities. Furthermore, resistance to cross-silo collaboration is often met with an equal resistance to cross-silo conflict resolution. This resistance is driven by a need to maintain the values and beliefs that constitute individual group identities, which often diverge from those of the overall organization (Wallpach & Woodside, 2009).

Organizational culture impacts how brands are interpreted internally, and therefore influences sustainable brand success. While cultural consistency is ultimately desired, it may not be as pragmatic as theory suggests. Evidence suggests that organizational culture is often more fragmented and diverse than portrayed in most branding literature, ultimately causing potential for brand confusion (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013).

2.3 Silos as Process Barriers to Brand Consistency

Organizational silos may also be revealed through examining the processes and information flow within an organization. When valuable information and resources remain compartmentalized among functional groups, processes become siloed. This limits opportunities for cross-functional collaboration and hinders the achievement of organization-wide objectives (Bento et al., 2020). These process barriers ultimately prevent activities and behaviors needed to unify the internal brand and deliver a consistent brand experience.

Process barriers emerge as silos often maintain their own, sometimes contradictory, performance objectives and goals. These conflicting objectives may also undermine the success of the aggregate brand strategy (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013). As processes become more compartmentalized and decentralized, operational autonomy among silos increases. And, without the guidance of centralized frameworks, management of these silos tends to be poor. Consequently, silos struggle to establish procedures for the effective translation of brand strategy into actions that align with the overarching brand vision (Aaker, 2008).

The aforementioned impact of silos on brand consistency may be realized through indicators such as inconsistent brand performance metrics across departments, overbranding or brand confusion, and mixed messaging across brand touchpoints (Aaker, 2008). Despite existing literature suggesting various managerial approaches to deconstruct or reorganize silos, marketing perspectives highlight the complexities involved in achieving this goal.

A top-down approach imposing centralized and standardized process frameworks to address silos presents its own set of challenges. Aaker (2008) emphasizes that while centralized processes may seem attractive in promoting brand consistency, over-centralization will likely be faced with strong resistance from managers. Additionally, over-centralization will potentially demotivate individuals by disrupting established performance metrics and impacting related compensation and recognition structures. This approach may be perceived as bureaucratic and controlling, as it removes decision-making autonomy and ownership from managers. (Aaker, 2008).

Building on Lencioni's (2006) leadership-based model for addressing silos, Serrat (2010) emphasizes leaders' responsibility in creating cross-functional processes that foster collaboration. Lessard and Zaheer (1996) further emphasize the role of these cross-functional processes in facilitating knowledge sharing across the firm. The authors suggest that organizations with established cross-functional processes are more effective in implementing strategic responses, specifically in reacting to external environmental changes.

Nonaka (1994) proposes a process-oriented approach to achieving silo-spanning brand goals. This approach emphasizes leveraging decentralized processes, but to only an extent that still maintains overall brand consistency. Since innovation thrives on diverse ideas and behaviors, the author contends that silos do not need identical processes or performance goals. However, a cohesive understanding of the brand and its objectives remains essential. Each siloed group should interpret these objectives in the context of their own goals and processes (Nonaka, 1994).

2.4 The Interdependency of Subcultures and Process Barriers

Although there is limited literature specifically addressing the impact of silos on managing brands, research indicates that internal misalignment stemming from differing in-group cultures does significantly impact how the brand is interpreted. These various interpretations influence performance goals and processes among silos, thus impacting how the brand is enacted (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013). Siloed decision-making processes, which often mirror the unique understandings of the brand, leads to inconsistent brand implementation (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013). Departments acting on individual brand perceptions create a fragmented brand experience.

Variations in interpretations extend not only to the brand itself but also to the degree of perceived influence on executing the brand. While initial strategic planning may foster alignment on the brand strategy, this cohesion weakens at the process level. Groups with a lower perceived influence on brand execution prioritize their silo goals, a tendency exacerbated by insufficient collaboration (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013). This is particularly prevalent when the brand's values lie far from those of group identities, as these groups may fail to recognize the importance of their roles in shaping the brand experience. Even when the strategic significance of a cohesive brand is acknowledged, overcoming wide-spread inertia and process barriers proves challenging (Aaker, 2008).

Gyrd-Jones et al. (2013) suggest three strategies for improving brand consistency. Firstly, alignment around the organization's brand should be actualized through a cohesive set of actions and behaviors across the organization's various departments and subcultures. These behaviors encompass how individuals within the organization interact, make decisions, execute tasks, and measure performance in accordance with the brand's principles. Secondly, to ensure that the brand's values resonate across the organization, they should be developed or revised in a way that they are compatible with the specific perspectives and priorities of various departments. Lastly, in approaching brand implementation, it is crucial that departments understand the brand's objectives and integrate them with their own objectives and performance metrics (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013)

2.5 Internal Branding

Internal branding, which aims to facilitate the internalization of brand values by employees so that their behaviors upon brand delivery are representative of the brand promise (Saleem and Iglesias, 2016), is recognized as a valuable tool in achieving a competitive advantage through unique positioning (Burmann et al., 2009). Existing literature on internal branding emphasizes the role of all employees, regardless of their functional responsibilities, in co-creating the brand (Wallpach and Woodside, 2009). While the extent of each individual or functional group's influence on the brand may vary, the entire organization should assume responsibility for embodying the brand's values in all interactions with internal and external stakeholders (Burmann et al., 2009).

Burmann et al. (2009) propose a behavioral model for internal brand management that focuses on the role of employee behavior in shaping brand strength. The model comprises two key components: brand commitment and brand citizenship behavior. Brand commitment refers to "the extent of psychological attachment of employees to the brand". Brand commitment consists of two dimensions: identification, which measures sense of belonging to the brand and the organization, and internalization, which measures the degree to which employees have integrated the brand's values into their thinking and actions.

Brand citizenship behavior refers to employee willingness to exercise brand-oriented efforts beyond their functional responsibilities to achieve the brand's goal. It encompasses actions that enhance the brand identity, a set of associations that the organization aspires to create in the minds of others to provide purpose and meaning for the brand (Aaker, 2008). This component is comprised of three dimensions: willingness to help, brand enthusiasm, and propensity for further brand and personal development (Burmann & Zeplin, 2009).

Internal brand alignment amongst siloed groups can therefore be characterized by variations in their enactments of the brand's values, that is brand commitment, and in variations in their perceived role in driving the brand's success, that is brand citizenship behavior. Building on Martin's (1992) theory on cultural differentiation and fragmentation, varying degrees of brand commitment is driven by discrepancies between in-group values of siloed groups and the brand's values. While brand beliefs and behaviors may be actively communicated within the organization, individuals within siloed departments may not integrate and 'live by the brand' as intended. They will instead implement their own interpretative beliefs and behaviors as it relates to their unique subcultures (Wallpach and Woodside, 2009). This diminishes internal branding efforts, and consequentially, brand strength.

Ideally, when employees exhibit behaviors consistent with brand values, regardless of their functional roles and group identities, it ensures a uniform delivery of the brand's promise. However, achieving this requires that employees not only understand the brand values but also genuinely internalize them in a consistent manner (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005). In organizations with multiple siloed groups, each with their own interpretations of the brand relative to their identities and responsibilities, fostering a shared understanding and internalization of the brand requires effective leadership-driven internal brand management.

2.6 Methodological Approach of Existing Literature

A scoping review by Bento et al. (2020) analyzes the existing body of research on organizational silos, revealing a broad range of studies on the phenomena across different industries. While a prevalent number of these studies focused on the healthcare industry, research also encompassed cross-sector focuses. Two main conceptualizations were identified regarding organizational silos: the first interpreting silos as limited communication and collaboration between functional teams, thus functional silos; and the second interpreting formal departments or units as barriers, thus structural silos (Bento et al., 2020).

The studies reviewed employed a variety of methodologies to analyze silos. The most prevalent approaches were qualitative methods such as case studies, interviews, descriptive accounts of change initiatives, or ethnographic studies. Some survey-focused studies were also included. Additionally, the review identifies a methodological gap in organizational silo research. Existing studies primarily rely on observational methods rather than experimental, creating opportunities for future research on causal relationships between specific variables in controlled settings (Bento et al., 2020).

While most of the studies aim to deconstruct or reorganize silos, some aim to develop a deeper understanding of silos. Very few aim to explore its impact on performance, leadership dynamics, or company culture. Overall, the main area of interest within existing literature rests in identifying strategies to overcome silos. The predominant use of qualitative methodologies has provided comprehensive accounts of how silos manifest in real-world settings and hence many studies leverage participant experiences to develop solutions tailored to specific organizational or industry contexts (Bento et al., 2020).

Gyrd-Jones et al. (2013) adopt a qualitative, case study design to explore "the impact of silos in achieving brand orientation" amid a brand revitalization strategy at a single firm in the retail sector. The case study methodology consists of in-depth interviews with managers across four departments, as well as field observations. By analyzing the various interviews, the authors reveal that conflict between functional silos, evident in the managerial decision-making process, significantly hindered the successful implementation of a new brand strategy. (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013)

A systematic review of internal branding literature by Barros-Arrieta and García-Cali (2021) highlights that the majority of existing research focuses on identifying the components and consequences of internal branding, with limited attention to the factors that influence successful internal branding. Notably, the review underscores a growing acceptance of the view that internal branding is a cross-functional process, a responsibility held by departments beyond marketing (Barros-Arrieta & García-Cali, 2021).

The review also identified a trend in research which focuses on service industries. This is likely due to the influence which service interactions between employees and customers have in shaping brand perceptions. While existing research is prevalent in a B2C context, there is a gap in B2B contexts. Barros-Arrieta and García-Cali (2021) address that the majority of literature is comprised of qualitative, cross-sectional studies focusing on employee perspectives. The authors underscore the value of future longitudinal studies to capture the evolving nature of internal branding over time. Additionally, the authors point to suggestions for experimental studies and replication of previous studies in more diverse sectors to enhance the applicability of findings (Barros-Arrieta & García-Cali, 2021).

3 Methodology

This study aims to investigate the following research question: How do organizational silos impact brand consistency? By analyzing various internal perspectives of employees of a financial services firm in the United States, the study aims to understand the following issues:

1. How do silos manifest within the organization?
2. How do silos impact internal brand alignment?
3. How does internal brand alignment affect overall brand consistency?

3.1 Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative design, utilizing a single-case setting for in-depth exploration of the research questions at hand. Qualitative research methods enable the collection of rich data consisting of detailed descriptions and comprehensive accounts of individual perspectives (Patton, 1990). Qualitative methodologies have previously been proven effective in exploring the intricacies of how silos manifest within real-world organizational settings (Bento et al., 2020).

Data collection consists of a combination of interviews and analysis of publicly available information from the firm's website which remain anonymized. A single-case research design is particularly useful when the investigation necessitates an intensive understanding of individual differences, diverse experiences, or the unique contextual factors shaping the phenomenon within a specific organizational setting (Patton, 1990).

This research utilizes semi-structured interviews to prompt deeper exploration of personal perspectives on the phenomenon being investigated. This approach prioritizes complete accounts of individual experiences and viewpoints primarily through open-ended questions. By virtue of their flexibility and spontaneity, semi-structured interviews can elicit diverse perspectives surrounding the central theme and potentially shed light on new information which may enrich the understanding of established theories (Karatsareas, 2022).

An interview guide is developed to ensure the collection of information central to the research themes, while simultaneously allowing for flexibility. The structured guide of questions serves as a framework yet remains adaptable based on participant responses. This fosters a more personalized and conversational approach to each interview (Turner, 2014).

3.1.1 Sampling

This study utilizes purposeful, non-random sampling to select the research setting and interview participants. Common to qualitative research, purposeful sampling allows for the deliberate selection of individuals or settings which are best able to provide rich information relevant to the research questions at hand (Patton, 1990). This approach can achieve greater homogeneity in population representation, or conversely, capture heterogeneity to understand the full scale of variation within a population. Additionally, purposeful sampling can facilitate comparisons across participants, revealing the reasons behind diverse individual perspectives or viewpoints (Bickman & Rog, 2008).

To achieve data triangulation, the sample group includes a selection of individuals across various hierarchical levels. This included executive, management, and associate level employees across the firm’s departments: marketing, operations, finance and accounting, sales, compliance, and advisor engagement. Additionally, the chief of staff, who plays a pivotal role in strategic planning and interdepartmental collaboration, was interviewed. By including a diverse group, the research was able to capture a range of perspectives. (Bickman & Rog, 2008).

To minimize potential bias, participants were selected to represent a diverse range of age, gender, seniority, and firm tenure (Patton, 2009). All interviews were conducted via and were subsequently transcribed for analysis. A sample of 11 participants was curated, encompassing 20% of the selected firm's employees (*Appendix 1*).

The decision to focus on the selected firm for the research setting is grounded in a combination of factors. Through my internship experience with Firm Z, I have developed relationships and trust with its employees, granting me a unique internal perspective on the firm's dynamics and the challenges it faces. This mutual sense of familiarity enables gathering rich interview data as participants may feel more comfortable sharing candid insights and opinions with a familiar face. Proximity to the firm allows for access to information that might not be readily available to an external researcher. Additionally, the executive level support I have received from the firm has been helpful in facilitating interview participant recruitment.

In selecting Firm Z for this research study, I am mindful of how my existing relationship with the firm may shape my interpretations of interview data. To mitigate this potential bias, I aim to leverage established trust with employees to facilitate open communication, detailed responses, and a comfortable interview environment to foster rich data collection. Furthermore, I aim to adopt and maintain an objective, neutral stance while remaining cognizant of how my prior experiences might influence my data analysis and interpretation.

3.1.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Effective qualitative research typically employs concurrent data collection and analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). This facilitates a progressive focus on data collection, allowing the researcher to refine and improve observation interpretations based on emerging themes from ongoing data analysis. It is equally important to utilize a framework for qualitative data analysis. These may include categorizing, such as thematic coding, and connecting strategies, such as narrative analysis (Bickman & Rog, 2008).

11 in-depth interviews were carried out with employees across different departments of the organization (*Appendix 1).* The question guide was constructed by drawing upon theory discussed

in the literature review (*Appendix 2*). However, this development process was also informed by the specific challenges currently faced by the organization.

Interview responses were transcribed and analyzed through an Iterative Thematic Inquiry (ITI) process. Morgan and Nica (2020) propose ITI as a qualitative data analysis method which prioritizes theme development, establishing a link between initial beliefs (preconceptions) and research actions (data collection and analysis) through an iterative process. According to the authors, ITI should progress through four phases: (1) translating preconceptions drawn from existing research into initial themes, (2) refining existing themes during data collection, (3) formulating provisional final themes, and (4) validating the themes through coding. This process ensures a well-grounded thematic analysis for research projects which include a statement of research questions (Morgan & Nica, 2020). For the purpose of this research, coding was executed with NVivo 14, a qualitative data analysis software which allows for streamlined and centralized sorting of transcribed interview data into various top-level codes and subcodes.

3.2 Research Setting

3.2.1 Firm Overview

Firm Z is a leading RIA (Registered Investment Advisor) firm in the wealth management industry within the United States. Established in 1997, this privately held wealth management firm stands as one of the country's largest and most rapidly expanding RIAs with a growing client base of more than 775 financial advisors across 41 states, and approximately $31.5 billion advisory AUM (assets under management). Firm Z has shifted towards an advisory-centric model, leveraging its resources and scale to offer solutions aimed at improving the financial outcomes for individual investors while driving efficiency for independent financial advisors.

For the purpose of this study, the end consumers of the firm, financial advisors, may hereon be referred to as "advisors".

3.2.2 Industry Trends and Business Model

The financial advisory sector has witnessed a growing trend towards independent and entrepreneurial practice models. This shift can be attributed to factors such as greater flexibility and autonomy, higher quality client service, and the potential for considerable higher earning structures. A study by Cerulli Associates (2023) found that 71% of financial advisors expressed a preference for independent affiliation over other employed channels, compared to 44% who are currently independent. This gap suggests a largely unmet demand for independent practice models within the financial advisor industry.

However, navigating the complexities of an independent practice can be daunting. Industry research suggests that compliance and administrative burdens pose significant challenges for independent advisors and RIAs in the United States. Approximately 23% of firms cite these factors as their most prominent operational hurdles (U.S. Advisor Edition, 2023).

Industry trends towards independent model preferences creates a strategic opportunity for partner firms to offer support as these practices grow, a niche area which Firm Z has demonstrably positioned itself as an early pioneer. Firm Z addresses these pain points by offering an affiliation-based model that enables its clients to thrive in today's financial services landscape. The firm provides a unique value proposition by equipping advisors with the experience, scale, skills, and resources typically associated with larger firms. This affiliation business model allows advisors to maintain their distinct brand identity and client focus while leveraging the support and infrastructure offered by the firm.

Firm Z's current affiliation model encompasses three distinct options:

1. Corporate Advisors: These advisors are registered to conduct both brokerage and/or advisory business through a partnered broker-dealer, while still benefiting from the collaborative culture fostered by the firm.
2. Hybrid Advisors: This model allows advisors to offer both brokerage services through a specific partnered broker-dealer and advisory services through Firm Z.
3. IAR-Only Advisors: These advisors focus solely on advisory services, registered exclusively with Firm Z.

Through flexible affiliation models, advisors receive access to quality investment solutions via a proprietary investment platform, comprehensive compliance support and risk management, succession and business continuity planning, a curated stack of technology solutions both in-house and in collaboration with industry-leading providers, and flexible multi-custodian options. The firm's size and scale create a competitive advantage through its ability to offer attractive compensation structures and sophisticated practice management tools at scaled pricing. This enables advisors to benefit from operational efficiency and focus on building and running their individual practices.

3.2.3 Historical Context

Founded in 1997 by its two original members as a financial advisory practice, the firm has experienced significant evolution. In 2011, the firm repositioned as an independent RIA, pivoting towards an advisor-centric business model, and expanding its national reach. In 2016, Firm Z introduced a pioneering compliance reporting process, streamlining regulatory compliance reportage for advisors. In 2018, Firm Z was first recognized by Barron's as a Top 10 RIA Firm in the United States, a status it has maintained for the last 5 years (2023 Top 100 RIA Firms, 2023). In 2020, Firm Z undertook strategic investments into its talent pool by making key leadership hires, as well as across its Technology, Compliance, Marketing, Business Development, and Advisor Engagement departments. Additionally, the firm broadened its custodial relationships to enhance flexibility for advisors.

In 2021, Firm Z established a strategic partnership through a non-controlling, minority investment by an equity capital partner, providing the firm with a capital infusion to accelerate growth. This enabled Firm Z to leverage the partnership in delivering growth solutions to affiliated advisors. The firm established a proprietary equity program offering advisors an opportunity to gain direct economic interest in the firm's community. For the first time, advisors were able to sell a portion of their revenue in exchange for equity participation and additional capital, while maintaining autonomy and independence. This year also marked the formation of a formal Advisor Council, a rotating group of advisors that represents the advisor community and guides the firm in aligning priorities and actions with the needs of the affiliated collective (company website, 2021).

In 2022, Firm Z unveiled an exclusive multi-custodian proprietary investment management platform for advisors. The launch of the wealth management platform addressed a key need expressed by the existing advisor base. Additionally, the platform's competitive pricing and integrated nature is anticipated to be an attractive differentiator to prospective advisors (company website, 2022). Both the bespoke platform and equity program have received industry recognition and were named as finalists for the WealthManagement.com 2023 'Wealthies' Awards and the 2023 ThinkAdvisor Luminaries Awards.

2023 witnessed a strategic leadership change at Firm Z, a CEO transition as part of a long-term succession plan. This strategic transition reinforced the firm's commitment to both preserving its organizational culture and enhancing the advisor experience (company website, 2023). By the end of the year, the firm undertook a physical expansion by relocating to a new, larger home office in New Jersey, and establishing an additional office in South Carolina. Additionally, Firm Z further invested in its talent pool by making key hires across its Finance, Compliance, Marketing, and Strategy departments.

3.2.4 A Brand with Culture at its Core

Firm Z cultivates a distinctive brand identity centered on a strong organizational culture. This culture, established by the founders' shared values of community, mutual respect, and trust, permeates all aspects of the organization. The organization fosters a close-knit environment, creating a sense of community among employees and the advisors. Despite growth and complexity, the firm strives to maintain an entrepreneurial spirit, encouraging initiative and shared ownership among employees. Additionally, building and maintaining strong relationships with advisors, clients, and the broader community is central to the firm's brand identity.

Several cultural elements are laced into the firms' brand positioning and messaging. The firm's purpose is to enable the delivery of independent financial advice through a network of advisors who are aligned in their commitment to the financial profession, highlighting the importance placed on community and collaboration. The firm's vision emphasizes "true independence for advisors", "financial freedom for investors" and "growth for our communities". This reinforces their commitment to supporting individual and collective success, as well as the entrepreneurial pursuit.

Firm Z's mission statement, "to form meaningful relationships with financial advisors, inspire entrepreneurs to build successful independent businesses, and change the lives of everyday investors," prioritizes fostering messages of community and inspiring growth. This emphasis extends to the firm's core values, which directly translate the cultural focus on light-heartedness ("Enjoy the Journey"), integrity ("Do it the Right Way"), respect ("Act With Care"), entrepreneurialism ("Adapt & Reimagine"), and philanthropy ("Give & Give More").

Firm Z reinforces this message through its tagline, "You're invited to grow with us." This invitation extends not only to advisors but also to the broader community, underscoring the brand's commitment to fostering relationships and supporting individual growth. Initiated by the founders, ever-present philanthropic efforts reinforce their values and connect them to the communities they serve. The firm’s brand strategy leverages its strong and purposeful culture. By emphasizing collaboration, relationship building, and a supportive environment, the firm aims to inspire a sense of community among employees and advisors.

3.2.5 Firm Performance

Firm Z has exhibited consistent growth, evident in their continued presence among the top 10 firms on Barron's list of Top RIAs in the United States. While their affiliated advisor count has steadily increased over time, exceeding 775 advisors in 2023, a recent pivot in their recruitment strategy is worth noting. Implemented in the last three years, this "less is more" approach aims to achieve quality over quantity, prioritizing advisors who align with the firm’s culture and benefit from affiliation with the firm. In 2023, the firm organically recruited $1.4 billion in AUM. While this figure denotes the firm's strong organic growth, it is worth noting that newly recruited AUM for prior years (2022: $4.4 billion, 2021: $3.3 billion) benefitted from additional contributions through mergers and acquisitions activities. Overall, these figures highlight the firm’s ability to attract high-quality advisors.

3.2.6 Future Strategic Initiatives

Looking forward, Firm Z aims for continued prioritization of long-term growth by equipping advisors with the necessary tools, resources, and value exchange to maintain their competitive position. Recognizing the evolving needs of younger advisors who may seek autonomy yet desire support in areas like lead generation and marketing, the firm is taking steps towards a multi-generational advisor affiliation model.

The comprehensive model for second generation advisors, which potentially includes employment options, caters to advisors at various stages of their lifecycle by offering multiple entry points. The strategic initiative will provide ongoing support in helping advisors to progress along the value chain. The firm's CEO acknowledges the need for significant strategic adjustments to implement this large-scale initiative. This commitment underscores leaderships' dedication to adapting alongside the evolving RIA landscape. As expectations within the RIA space transform, Firm Z recognizes the need to evolve in tandem.

3.3 Firm Selection Decision

Firm Z presents a compelling context for exploring the impact of organizational silos on brand consistency. The firm has cultivated a national footprint and network of affiliated advisors. Useful insights may be drawn from investigating how the nature of its brand has evolved with the firm. As the firm accommodates a broader advisor base, its structure has become increasingly sophisticated. Departments have been expanded, and new teams dedicated to new business functions have been established. This growing complexity introduces the potential for siloed communication and processes, hindering the effectiveness of internal branding efforts.

Firm Z has transformed into a geographical dispersed network of employees with a new office based in South Carolina and a growing base of remote employees across the country, increasing the risk of siloed teams and departments. Operating in a highly regulated industry, the firm relies heavily on compliance-driven processes within dedicated teams. This focus, coupled with the expansion to serve a broader spectrum of advisors with diverse needs and expectations, increases the risk of information and process silos emerging within specialized teams.

Since nearly all the firm's departments interact with advisors throughout their lifecycle, any disconnect in how the brand is internalized risks being translated through multiple interactions advisors have with different departments. Inconsistencies in brand messaging across these touch points can have a significant impact. The firm's brand identity is deeply rooted in its culture. Examining how effectively this cultural message translates across departments and teams will be critical in understanding the influence of culture on organizational silos and the strength of the firm's internal brand. The enduring influence of the founders' vision, still present in brand messaging, raises an interesting question: how deeply do the brand's values permeate the organization?

The firm currently faces the challenges adapting and formalizing processes to accommodate its growing workforce. This lag in formalization can significantly hinder the firm's ability to maintain efficient internal information flow. Further complicating this challenge is the current lack of internal communication system and strategy.

The lack of centralized internal knowledge sharing and communication strategies may exacerbate the potential for silos, especially as the firm continues to grow and complex. This context offers a strong opportunity for analyzing the challenges of communication among silos. Additionally, the firm's workforce composition presents a compelling research angle. A significant portion of employees have a long tenure with the firm. In contrast, a series of recent investments into its talent pool have introduced new wave of personnel. This warrants exploration into how this influx has influenced silo formation.

By investigating the perspectives of employees and leadership, this research setting can provide valuable insights for firms navigating similar complexities.

4 Findings

4.1 Research Question 1: How do silos manifest within the organization?

4.1.1 Disrupted Information Flow

The interview data reveals a critical challenge in information flow as the organization scales. Silo behaviors, likely a consequence of rapid workforce expansion in the past five years, impede information transparency and create a fragmented view of organizational processes and resources. This is further exacerbated by unclear process ownership and communication breakdowns across departments. Previously, informal knowledge sharing methods may have sufficed relative to the firm’s small size. However, workforce growth necessitates the implementation of formal frameworks and clear expectations for collaboration, communication, and knowledge sharing.

Without these measures, silos become more likely to develop and solidify due to reinforcing behavioral and knowledge barriers. The interview data highlights roadblocks to effective information flow within the organization: outdated or inaccurate information and unclear process ownership.

4.1.2 Inaccurate or Outdated Information

Employees often struggle to obtain a complete and accurate picture the cross-departmental information. Doubts about information accuracy have fostered a culture of verification, where employees constantly seek confirmation from their colleagues, leading to an inefficient use of resources.

> *"I'm always hesitant, and it does make it harder to be efficient, when you have to question whether or not certain things are accurate."*

While many resources and process materials do exist, they are not centralized and may even exist as various versions, housed on various platforms. This lack of a central repository contributes to knowledge gaps across the organization. While documenting and updating accurate information may be intended on a departmental level, it is often not prioritized. Overall, the challenge lies in independently accessing accurate information for oneself or on behalf of advisors, revealing a significant degree of siloed knowledge within the organization.

4.1.3 Unclear Process Ownership

Difficulties in identifying appropriate points of contact further exacerbates the issue, as employees' often resort to contacting multiple individuals within one or even multiple departments to find answers. While the organization's size still allows for relatively easy access to individuals, identifying the true owner of specific subject matter remains a significant challenge. Reaching out to multiple sources can yield inconsistent responses. This doesn't necessarily indicate that multiple individuals own the subject matter, but rather that one might be the true expert while the others possess "tribal knowledge" on the subject.

"If I reach out to multiple people if I'm not sure who owns it, the responses I get are slightly different."

Employees are frequently unsure of who owns specific processes due to several factors. First, limited understanding of internal processes across departments creates a lack of clarity. Second, frequent turnover of departmental responsibilities coupled with inadequately documented updates creates confusion. Third, it is common for multiple individuals to possess knowledge on perform certain tasks. While formal ownership may be assigned to one individual at a time, redundant expertise blurs ownership lines. Finally, the concentration of tacit knowledge with a few key individuals creates bottlenecks. This impacts efficient information sharing due to the absence of clear documentation as the firm expanded.

Uneven information flow is further exacerbated by departmental dynamics where some departments primarily act as repositories of knowledge, with others seeking them out for information and subject matter expertise. The Compliance team, for example, is frequently sought after by other departments due to the firm's focus on advisor compliance support. This suggests limited bi-direction information flow, as some departments have no direct need to understand the processes of others.

"If it doesn't involve compliance, we wouldn't go seek it. We see other departments coming to us for information versus the other way around."

While not unique to this organization, some departments are naturally more collaborative due to proximity and intertwined processes. Operations and Compliance, for instance, have clearer understandings of each other's work due to their close collaboration. However, these departments may remain unaware of the process of other departments, like Marketing.

Participants acknowledge that some complexity in identifying clear process owners and accurate information inherently stems from the dynamic nature of the financial services industry. Individuals are frequently pulled into other areas to address urgent needs, both temporary and permanent. Also, external regulations and procedures are constantly evolving. Despite this, participants acknowledge that these challenges primarily stem from the absence of a formal intranet, established internal communication strategies, and certain formal processes and procedures. In the absence of these factors, it is challenging to maintain a clear picture of process ownership and to sustain efficient and accurate information flow.

4.1.4 Lack of Process Formalization

The interview data reveals a disconnect between the firm's expanding workforce and its level of process formalization. Strategic workforce growth necessitates the concurrent formalization of processes. However, implementation appears to be lagging behind. This lack of clearly defined procedures challenges efficient information flow, collaboration, and communication.

The absence of formalization reinforces silo behaviors. As departments deepen their expertise without processes for documentation, information becomes increasingly isolated. This creates a feedback loop as further siloed information makes it increasingly difficult to implement standardized expertise documentation. Tacit knowledge held by individuals is no longer sustainable as the organization expands. Such tacit knowledge becomes a barrier rather than a resource when it remains undocumented.

"Institutional knowledge is really just in those key people. I think we have passed a point where we now see the benefit to capturing some resources and processes not via phone or Zoom."

Strategic expansion has brought in a wave of new employees with corporate backgrounds, accustomed to more formalized structures and processes. While these individuals were drawn to the firm's entrepreneurial spirit, their arrival highlights the need for increased formalization. Balancing this need with a well-established culture of employee autonomy presents a significant hurdle.

Interview data suggests that the firm is taking initial steps towards formalization, with recent initiatives to document and centralize advisor-facing resources. A generally open attitude among participants towards formalization suggests an opportunity to find a workable equilibrium that integrates the benefits of formalization while preserving certain leveraged cultural elements, such as agility and entrepreneurialism.

A complex view of formalization exists within the organization. While many participants favor clearer frameworks and expectations associated with process formalization, there is a concern about "scope creep." Leadership worries about the development of centralized procedures devolving from effective documenting of workflows to dictating how employees perform their jobs. There is a strong recognition of the potential for process centralization to demotivate and discourage employees, leading to reduced autonomy. The challenge which leadership faces lies in navigating this concern and finding a way to frame formalization as an "energizing exercise" that fosters clarity and ownership.

"We have bled from process documentation to defining process for other people. And I think that's really disengaging more than what process documentation as an extra administrative burden is."

Leadership recognizes the importance of finding a middle ground between a relaxed culture that is 25 years in the making and the growing need for process formalization. This balance involves strategic decisions about which processes to formalize, how best to support different departments in doing so, the technology and methods to be used, and how such formalization should be measured as it relates to the goals and values of the firm. Participants also emphasize the need for a measured approach to process formalization. This involves experimentation and gauging responses to avoid employee or advisor alienation.

"There is a fear of moving in any one direction too fast. And I think that is a good fear to have."

4.1.5 Collaboration and Communication

An interesting distinction is revealed between collaboration and true cross-departmental integration. Interactions are often limited to specific tasks and collaboration often occurs in a unidirectional manner. This appears to hinder reciprocal knowledge exchange and limit understanding of internal processes across the firm. However, some exceptions exist. For instance, teams like Compliance and Operations demonstrate a more collaborative partnership, working with advisors to complete operational tasks. These areas of natural intersection foster deeper cross-departmentation integration.

Participants describe frequently reaching out to specific departments with seemingly straightforward questions, only to have the inquiry bounced around via email with no clear answer. The absence of a comprehensive internal communication system exacerbates the issue. Many are of the impression that there are opportunities to implement a clear communication pathway to make collaboration easier.

> *"We could solve a lot of problems if we could find a way to internally communicate and chat with each other, instead of fifty emails going back and forth"*

Employees suggest that a robust intranet and internal communication system could significantly address these issues. The current reliance on email, often resulting in lengthy threads, underscores the need for a more efficient system. Furthermore, the study highlights a fragmented communication culture. While some participants perceive internal communication as adequate, others find it significantly ineffective.

Leadership acknowledges the potential for improved communication workflows and technology but worries about eliminating autonomy over communication style. And while industry-wide regulatory challenges pose barriers to certain solutions such as Instant Messaging, there exists strategic discussion around expanding the way employees are able to communicate with each other.

> *"The standard that we should be holding ourselves should be 'how can we better support teams in communicating with each other?' I think we're on the first step in many ways of just making it a lot easier to be supported in communicating with each other."*

4.2 Research Question 2: How do silos impact internal brand alignment?

4.2.1 Brand Understanding

This research identifies tenure as a key factor contributing to disjointed brand understandings. Newer employees, having joined the firm during the brand's recent refresh, hold an aspirational view of the brand and value its role as a complex business partner and problem-solver. Conversely, legacy employees hold a more traditional perspective, potentially shaped by the brand's origins as a generic disclosure item. This long-standing view emphasizes a simpler, practical understanding, often limited to core functions like compliance, advisor support, and community.

Interestingly, interviews revealed a potential gap in brand education. Newer employees with limited tenures may have a weaker grasp of the firm's collective value operations and the interconnectedness of roles. The absence of formal onboarding and processes for brand education is evident. Participants report a reliance on informal, on-the-job learning. This suggests a lack of standardized dissemination of brand knowledge, potentially contributing to inconsistency in brand interpretation.

"If you ask some newer employees that have been here a year or two, they probably know less about how we operate as a collective and little about how all of our roles and teams impact advisors."

Rapid company growth presents challenges in brand education. The influx of new hires alongside long tenured employees creates a brand knowledge gap. Leadership acknowledges the difficulty in effectively communicating the brand vision amid rapid growth, shifting roles, and adapting priorities. A core challenge identified is fostering a cohesive brand understanding while maintaining agility in responding strategically to advisors' evolving needs and industry dynamics. Leadership seeks a solution that promotes consistent brand integration without impeding operational efficiency.

Data further reveals that departments interpret the brand's meaning through the lens of their core functions. Interestingly, Marketing embraces an emotional and community-oriented interpretation, emphasizing the brand's ability to inspire advisors. Conversely, Compliance and Finance prioritize the brand's practical role in supporting advisor independence by alleviating compliance and administrative burdens. Operations occupies a middle ground, perceiving the brand as conveying a message of community and support, "we're on your side”, with a mix of social and functional aspects.

Research also reveals contrasting leadership perspectives on brand understanding, particularly regarding the concept of "family.” Some advocate for a community-based brand message, emphasizing "family" as having limited scalability and scope for the brand's future direction. Others acknowledge "family" as being foundational to the firm since its genesis and suggest this messaging be expanded to encompass adjacent themes such as supporting owner-operated/entrepreneurial practices, a growing advisor demographic. While acknowledging the limitations of "family" as a core brand message, they see potential strategic adaptation as the firm scales.

“Family can’t be scaled as a brand message in the direction we want to go in. From where we're heading, it shouldn’t be family, it should be community.”

“I think family themes will have some staying power. I think strategically you can expand that as well.”

These contrasting leadership views exemplify the potential impact of leadership behaviors on brand interpretation. The absence of a unified brand perspective from leadership likely allows inconsistencies to permeate departmental and individual understandings of the brand.

4.2.2 Brand Responsibility & Ownership

Further analysis also reveals uneven brand ownership across the organization. Marketing, due to its public-facing nature, perceives itself as the primary brand steward, responsible for shaping external perceptions. Conversely, departments like Finance and Compliance primarily focus on the brand's tangible aspects. This likely hinders their engagement with the brand's broader messaging and values.

While departments like Operations, Finance, Advisor Engagement, and Compliance also interact with advisors and other external stakeholders, their focus is on fulfilling practical objectives that support advisors' day-to-day operations. However, these departments increasingly recognize their role in shaping advisor impressions, even if their interactions are not explicitly framed as brand centric. This suggests a growing awareness of an implicit brand delivery responsibility within these various advisor-facing roles.

Further analysis shows a discrepancy in brand ownership that transcends departmental boundaries. While participants in advisor-facing roles like Compliance and Operations report a stronger sense of brand responsibility, this is not universally true across all roles in these departments. Similarly, within other departments like Finance, individuals with limited client interaction likely feel a weaker connection to the brand compared to their advisor-facing colleagues. This highlights that brand responsibility is not solely departmental. Those with frequent advisor contact tend to have a stronger sense of brand ownership.

Participants expressed a desire for leadership to be more proactive in identifying exemplary champions of the brand. They suggested that by drawing out stories of individuals who embody the brand values, leadership could encourage broader and more consistent brand emulation. Additionally, participants commended the firm’s efforts to hold individuals accountable for behaviors that deviate from established cultural expectations and brand values.

Interestingly, participants view legacy leaders, founders, and senior management as de facto brand representatives. This perception stems partly from their long-standing relationships with advisors and partly from their public-facing roles. This dynamic appears to foster an expectation that leadership bears the primary responsibility for the brand. And while a partially necessary expectation to have in this particular industry, potential over-reliance on specific leaders to carry the brand may impede the development of a more widespread sense of brand ownership.

4.3 Research Question 3: How does internal brand alignment affect overall brand consistency?

4.3.1 Internal and External Brand Identity

There is misalignment between the firm's desired brand image and how it is perceived by the external market and advisors. Participants described a prevailing external perception of the company as a "solid community of people with a fun culture.” This perception likely reflects the firm’s historical legacy. As a result, recent initiatives to refresh the brand and evolve the external image have been hindered due to the social resonance and entrenched identity of the firm. Internal challenges in aligning employee behavior with the desired brand image further impede this process. Leadership expresses doubt that everyday actions consistently reflect the aspirational brand.

“As we have grown, there is a mismatch in internal and external culture. We're telling advisors they’re the center of our universe and then stuff comes in and doesn't get processed that way. When you have that kind of brand mismatch, it's really hard to tell them what you want to be.”

4.3.2 Operationalizing the Brand

While brand messaging emphasizes a highly advisor-centric approach, delivery of those values through certain operational realities appear to fall short. This creates a brand mismatch. Participants highlighted this inconsistency in accounts of disjointed advisor customer service. These included delayed response times and inefficient hand-offs across departments, with more valuable advisors often receiving faster service than others at times. Participants noted the absence of clearly defined expectations for response times, an issue that has become more pronounced with the company's growth. These inconsistencies contribute to a gap between the promised brand experience and the delivered reality.

“Some of our top advisors will get answers a lot quicker. I think this could use some work because we want to be able to provide a very similar level of service, no matter how valuable the advisor is to the company.”

While some participants in advisor-facing roles reported direct external feedback regarding slow responses, they also believe the sentiment is shared across other department touchpoints. Potential for similar experiences across other advisor touchpoints suggests a lack of well-defined internal feedback mechanisms, leaving employees feeling unsure about the appropriate channels for reporting such observations. Leadership acknowledges a challenge in solving service gaps and worries that standardized customer service processes will reduce employee autonomy. This suggests a concern about micromanagement while striving for brand consistency. Leadership proposes reducing contact points within the firm for advisors with the aim of minimizing inconsistencies arising from interactions with multiple individuals.

While streamlining touchpoints might improve efficiency, it could be seen as treating the external symptom rather than the internal cause. Interview data suggests that implementing and conditioning this behavior among advisors may not be that straightforward. The firm's entrenched, close-knit culture fosters personal relationships between advisors and specific employees or leaders. Advisors may often rely on these established connections instead of contacting the most appropriate person for their inquiry. This advisor behavior, though common in the industry for smaller firms, will become increasingly unsustainable as the company grows.

4.3.3 Perceived Brand Consistency

Participants held a spectrum of perceptions regarding brand consistency. Some expressed confidence in the brand's consistent experience, acknowledging room for improvement but valuing the industry reputation of the firm. Others expressed mild confidence in delivering a consistent experience. While acknowledging efforts to deliver consistent advisor experience, some participants expressed concern about the feasibility of meeting advisor expectations given current resource limitations. This suggests a potential disconnect between the "on-stage" brand promise and internal capacity to consistently deliver on those promises.

> *"I imagine there is a there is a brand that lives day-to-day versus a brand that we have on stage."*

While most participants describe a positive, unified internal culture, there are concerns regarding adherence to terminology practices. The Marketing department emphasizes consistent brand terminology, particularly the use of the full firm name and program titles. While some progress has been made, the continued use of abbreviations by some managers hinders the desired behavioral shift within the organization.

4.4 Navigating Brand Alignment through Current Process Formalization

The firm is actively developing and piloting a proprietary platform for advisors that will serve as a centralized system to streamline access to resources, news, events, and other tools. This initiative addresses challenges in information flow through external contexts, aiming to improve resource transparency, advisor productivity and elevating the advisor experience.

This cross-functional initiative exemplifies the brand’s resilience navigating multiple diverse perspectives and contributions. All departments and individual process owners collaborated to identify the most relevant information and resources for the platform's centralized content. However, a key challenge to development was fostering departmental collaboration without excessive marketing and leadership oversight.

Ideally, the platform will encourage departments beyond marketing to absorb and integrate elements of the brand and become familiarized with how the brand translates into their specific roles and processes. The platform is seen by participants as a potential catalyst for enhanced brand consistency through future and current employee engagement.

While reflecting on the collaborative process, participants acknowledged the success in achieving a brand-aligned outcome but highlighted concerns regarding its resource and labor intensity. They expressed a desire for more efficient collaboration methods for future process formalization initiatives.

While primarily serving advisors, participants express immediate excitement about the centralized access to cross-departmental information offered by the platform. Though it does not fully address issues of limited resource transparency and unclear process ownership, participants view it as a significant step forward and are eager to embrace its full potential and advocate for its use within the organization.

5 Discussion

5.1 How do silos manifest within the organization?

The research findings illuminate the organizational dynamics that contribute to the formation of silos within the firm. Recent internal expansion has facilitated greater departmental specialization. However, a critical disconnect between the scaling workforce and the level of process formalization is revealed. Information and processes have become increasingly siloed. Departmental expertise has deepened without the necessary adjacent mechanisms for efficient firm-wide information flow. While formalization of processes might seem like a natural response to growth, Firm Z has not established some of the foundational elements for doing so.

The resulting process-barriers create a prime environment for silo behaviors. As cross-departmental knowledge sharing becomes hindered, employees struggle to obtain complete, accurate information, to identify appropriate points of contact, and to communicate effectively. These factors limit the necessary level of cross-departmental coordination required to facilitate true cross-functional interdependencies (Bento et al., 2020)

Knowledge gaps form as a result of limited information transparency and unclear process ownership. While process ownership may be understood implicitly within departments, a lack of consistent documentation creates confusion. This confusion is further compounded by redundant expertise and high concentration of tacit knowledge across departments.

These process barriers contribute to limited employee understanding of internal processes across the firm. This lack of clarity exemplifies that the firm is characterized more by functional isolation than by interdepartmental consistency (Wallpach & Woodside, 2009). Furthermore, this suggests that a lack of connectivity between cognitive factors across the organization, specifically degrees of knowledge, influence the formation of process-driven silos (Bento et al., 2020)

Without the necessary frameworks in place to bridge knowledge gaps as expertise deepens, departments likely struggle with self-management in establishing workflows for efficient cross-departmental information flow (Aaker, 2008). Such operational autonomy within departments reinforces process barriers to silo-linking behaviors (Bento et al., 2020).

The prevalence of unidirectional collaboration limits the reciprocal exchange of knowledge. While some bi-directional collaboration exists between naturally intersecting departments, information flow faces barriers of unclear ownership and high ownership turnover. This aligns with Aaker (2008) who highlights the risk of execution obstacles even in beneficial cross-silo collaborations due to information flow challenges. Limited bi-directional collaborative efforts reduce motivation and expectations for coordination between departments. Departments with few established cross-collaborations likely become closed environments with stronger in-group identities (Cilliers & Greyvenstein, 2012).

Existing theory suggests silos give rise to highly fragmented subcultures working in opposition (Martin, 1992; Lencioni, 2006), this research reveals a more positive dynamic among employees. Despite process barriers to information flow, a strong sense of belonging to the firm's shared organizational values is evident. Additionally, evidence suggests that the firm's relatively small size facilitates accessible contact and communication with employees across the firm. This showcases alignment on certain environmental factors across the firm, specifically culture and access within the organization (Bento et al., 2020) This highlights the fluidity of organizational silos, demonstrating that distinctly fragmented subcultures are not always a defining characteristic (Bento et al., 2020).

Organizations that successfully mitigate silos foster a culture not only encouraging cross-departmental collaboration but also institutionalizing expectations for it (Briody & Erickson, 2014). While leadership may acknowledge process barriers, hesitancy in implementing centralized frameworks lies in concerns over reducing autonomy and demotivating employees. Navigating the trade-off between employee autonomy and process formalization remains a challenge. This leadership dilemma aligns with Aaker's (2008) marketing perspective in recommending against drastic centralization as a means to mitigate the silo effect on branding.

5.2 How do silos impact internal brand alignment?

Siloed brand understandings exist among the firm's employees as a direct result of limited institutionalized processes for brand education. The firm as not historically communicated its brand values in a way which facilitates effective internalization (Burmann et al., 2009). The absence of formal onboarding and channels for continued brand dissemination challenges the firm's ability to cultivate internal brand alignment. Department leads have not been equipped with the formal frameworks to effectively communicate brand values and integrate them with departmental. Barriers to centralized information flow further hinders employees' ability to absorb consistent representations of the brand elements.

Employees typically rely on informal brand education. This decentralized approach is likely influenced by cross-pollination through proximity of peers as well as through the context of functional roles. Under these conditions, the interpretation of brand values tends to reflect the contextual uniqueness of department identities and functions (Wallpach & Woodside, 2009). This creates varying levels of brand commitment, a result of high decentralization on internal brand alignment (Burmann et al., 2009; Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013). The absence of formal brand education also hinders the understanding of how different departments contribute to overall brand vision (Lencioni, 2006).

While the Marketing department naturally exhibit a higher degree of brand citizenship behavior due to their inherent responsibilities (Burmann et al., 2009), other departments such as Operations and Compliance demonstrate a strong awareness of their brand responsibility. This awareness lays a valuable foundation for future internal branding initiatives and supports the idea that all employees, regardless of functional role, to actively contribute to co-creating the brand identity (Wallpach & Woodside, 2009).

Evidence from this research suggests that variations in brand citizenship behavior emerge not only by nature of departmental functions and identities, but also by nature of individual roles. This role-based perspective to brand citizenship behavior is informed by individual employees with external-facing roles having a higher sense of brand ownership than those with internal-facing roles, even across the same department. This demonstrates that perceived degree of influence on the external environment varies across departments as well as within departments, influencing internal brand alignment (Burmann et al., 2009).

A culture of storytelling, passed down over time, has led to reliance on anecdotal communication of the brand and its history. In the absence of a centralized internal communication strategy, employees outside of Marketing may not yet understand the power of leveraging the brand and its articulated elements. Recent formalization of the brand's values, principles, and mission suggests a prior of absence of internal branding efforts.

5.3 How does internal brand alignment affect overall brand consistency?

Though employees are in general alignment in recognizing the strategic importance of brand consistency, brand internalization seems fragmented at the process level. High department decentralization challenges the effective translation of brand values into actions (Aaker, 2008). Evidence suggests a disparity between the firm's aspirational brand and its day-to-day internal practices. Operational realities of the brand's delivery reflect inconsistent internalization. Without the appropriate frameworks, departments struggle to establish mechanisms for integrating brand values as intended (Wallpach & Woodside, 2009). This portrays the influence of process barriers in brand delivery.

Silo behavior, reinforced through various process barriers, create challenges across external touchpoints. This is often realized through indicators such as brand confusion and inconsistent customer service (Aaker, 2008). A lack of formal expectations for consistency of standard across external touchpoints has resulted in delayed response times and inefficient inquiry handoffs across departments. Compounding this is the absence of clear feedback workflows for proactively addressing inconsistencies in service delivery.

For Firm Z, hesitation to implement formal procedures likely stems from its organizational culture of autonomy and entrepreneurialism. Leadership prioritizes internal motivation and a sense of community, fearing that moving in the direction of corporatization will be met with resistance and disrupt cultural values. This creates a cyclical dilemma: the desire for brand consistency necessitates a shift towards process formalization, yet leadership worries that process formalization will jeopardize autonomy, which is culturally leverage. This aligns with the application of reciprocal determinism which suggests a cyclical relationship between silo behavior shaping organizational culture and, in turn, culture influencing silo behavior (Bandura, 1978; Bento et al., 2020).

Establishing procedures for external touchpoints, such as standardized terminology and response times, is crucial for delivering a consistent brand experience. However, leaders should assess and implement such changes in a way that energizes employees. These frameworks need not stifling innovation and autonomy, but clearly enable departments to understand brand objectives in the context of their functional goals (Nonaka, 1994). A core facilitator of brand consistency is the proactive reinforcement of expectations for conscious brand enactment with adequate support and workflows to do so (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013).

6 Conclusions

6.1 Closing Remarks

This research investigated the influence of organizational silos on internal brand alignment and overall brand consistency. The studied firm exhibited silo-driving and silo-driven process barriers, including unclear ownership, limited resource transparency, and reliance on tacit knowledge. While the presence of various process barriers contributes to siloed information and limited knowledge sharing, employees demonstrated a strong sense of belonging to the organization's shared values and culture. This underscores the complexity of organizational silos; their defining characteristics, structures, and functions may vary considerably across organizations.

This research identifies a lack of formalized processes for brand education as a key factor hindering internal brand alignment. Employees rely on informal channels, leading to siloed interpretations of brand values. Although most recognize the importance of brand consistency, a disparity exists between the aspirational brand and day-to-day practices. This inconsistency stems from the absence of frameworks for integrating brand values into departmental workflows.

Lack of centralized frameworks for brand internalization creates a two-fold challenge. First, it limits employees' understanding of how their functional roles contribute to the brand's overall objectives. Second, it hinders employees' understanding of how leveraging the brand can contribute to departmental success. This lack of clarity can lead to variations in brand commitment and brand citizenship behavior.

Achieving brand consistency necessitates proactive leadership action. Leaders must reinforce expectations for conscious brand enactment within the context of individual roles and responsibilities. This requires establishing workflows that facilitate effective brand internalization. However, the trade-off between process formalization and employee autonomy presents a challenge for firms seeking greater brand consistency.

6.2 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This research contributes to the understanding of organizational silos and their impact on brand consistency in several ways. Firstly, it highlights that process barriers are not just symptoms of silos, but also play a key role in fostering silo behaviors that ultimately hinder internal brand alignment. Secondly, it challenges some traditional view of silo mentality. Past research often portrays silos as isolated entities driven by fragmented subcultures. This study reveals that silo behavior can still thrive in organizations with cultural consistency. Finally, it highlights that brand citizenship behavior is influenced not only by departmental functions but by individual roles and the impact they have on external stakeholders.

This research further offers valuable insights for leadership navigating challenges to brand consistency. Firstly, the research emphasizes the critical role of centralized frameworks. Implementing formal frameworks for internal and external communications, brand education, and centralized knowledge exchange can address process barriers to internal brand alignment. This fosters greater firm-wide information transparency and knowledge sharing, leading to a greater internalization of the brand's core values and messaging. This translates into a more consistent and impactful delivery of the brand promise. Secondly, the research highlights the importance of leadership transparency in framing internal brand alignment. By consistently sharing both thematic and operational brand objectives, leadership can consistency communicate the brand's vision.

Equipping department leads with frameworks to integrate these objectives into departmental goals can enable employees to understand the impact of their roles on achieving the brand's vision.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

This research presented limitations due to time constraints and the specific context of the firm. While a longitudinal study would have been an appropriate research approach, it was infeasible within the timeframe of the dissertation. Focus groups were also deemed impractical due to scheduling conflicts and participant workloads. While individual interviews fostered a more intimate and open environment, especially considering existing working relationships with participants, they may not have generated an equal level of inter-departmental cross-pollination as focus groups.

Interviewing the entire organization was desired due to its relatively small size. This was not achievable within the timeframe of the dissertation. The sheer volume of data collection and interpretation associated with more than fifty interviews would have exceeded available time. Similarly, including external stakeholders was met with regulatory and confidentiality limitations.

Furthermore, the decision to focus on a single firm for the setting of the study potentially constrains the generalizability and statistical representativeness of the research. However, focusing on the firm's unique complexities presented a valuable opportunity to address specific issues relevant to the research question. Finally, the subjectivity inherent in qualitative data due to individual interpretations and potential self-censorship is to be equally acknowledged alongside the aforementioned limitations.

Future research may focus on the multifaceted relationship between organizational silos and brand consistency, potentially using longitudinal studies to examine the evolution of internal and external brand alignment over time. Given the knowledge gap regarding the impact of silos on organizational goals, further research into effective mechanisms for mitigating silos is crucial. This could involve studying the impact of cross-functional teams, knowledge-sharing initiatives, or leadership development programs designed to foster collaboration and information transparency.

Further research may also explore the influence of various organizational structures on silo formation. This may involve identifying analyzing structural models that facilitate effective information flow and collaboration across departments. Beyond silos, research could explore the impact of other internal factors on brand consistency.

Appendix

Interview Date	Participant	Position	Department
05/06/24	01	Finance Associate	Finance & Accounting
05/07/24	02	Director of Advisor Growth & Engagement	Advisor Growth & Engagement
05/07/24	03	Head of Marketing	Marketing
05/07/24	04	Digital Marketing Manager	Marketing
05/08/24	05	Head of Sales & Solutions	Business Development
05/10/24	06	Head of Finance	Finance & Accounting
05/10/24	07	Compliance Manager	Compliance
05/13/24	08	Operations Associate	Operations
05/13/24	09	Operations Associate	Operations
05/14/24	10	Chief Operations Officer	Operations
05/15/24	11	Chief of Staff	-

Appendix 1: Interview Participants and Anonymization.

Research Question	Umbrella Interview Questions
1. How do silos manifest within the organization?	i. What are the main priorities and processes of your team/department? ii. How familiar would you say your team is with the processes or resources owned by other departments? iii. How confident do you feel that other departments have a clear understanding of the services which your team provide and the processes you own? iv. How easy is it for you to access information about the processes owned by departments? v. How would you describe internal communications across the organization?
2. How do silos impact internal brand management?	i. How confident are you that employees across different departments have a clear understanding of the brand guidelines and messaging? ii. Do you think there is an equal sense of ownership and responsibility for the overall brand? iii. How well do you understand what our organization promises and delivers advisors? iv. What does internal feedback look like today?
3. How does internal alignment affect brand consistency?	i. To what extent do you think your team has a direct influence on shaping how our brand is experienced externally? ii. Has cross-department collaboration ever made it difficult to achieve a cohesive brand message? iii. How would you describe the consistency of advisor experiences across different touchpoints in the organization?

Appendix 2: Research questions and corresponding interview questions.

Theme	Relevant Sub-theme	Specific Quotes
Informational Flow	Process Ownership	*"Sometimes it's unclear who does what, or there's questions that nobody's really technically in charge of answering so that ends up being a like hot potato situation where one person gets stuck figuring how to move forward."* *"I feel like there's so many changes and shifts that it is hard to remember exactly who's responsible for what."* *"I think information is still very siloed."*
	Process Formalization	*"We are woefully lacking processes and procedures, and maybe even lacking some of the foundation to introduce that in a meaningful way."* *"I think one challenge is we have bled from process documentation to defining process for other people. And I think that's more disengaging than the extra administrative burden of it."* *I actually don't think that the key issue is in adoption. I think it's when we scope creep from 'how can I help you get this down on paper' to 'how can I tell you how to do your job?'. I think we could do a better job of making that an energizing exercise versus a boxing-in exercise."* *"Being able to access things on your own is still a bit of a challenge."*
	Resource Accuracy	*"Even though the information is out there, I'll still email who I think is the subject matter expert to verify if the documented information is still accurate. I'm always hesitant, and it makes it harder to be efficient, when you have to question whether or not certain things are accurate or not."* *"I can reach out to anyone in the organization, and they'll be responsive but it's getting a fully accurate answer. That is very challenging, and that all speaks to not having a formal intranet, no formal internal comms, and no formal processes and procedures."*
Communication Factors	Internal Communication	*"Even if it's sometimes it's unclear who is actually in charge of something or what it is that another department does, I'd say it's relatively easy to seek it out because it's*

		still a relatively small company. It's easy to just reach out.” *“I think that's the standard to which we should be holding ourselves should be how can we better support teams in communicating with each other? I think we're on the first step in many ways of making it a lot easier to be supported in communicating with each other.”* *“We do a lot over email. We do a lot of phone calls. There's other stuff in the world […] That's something that I think about a lot right now. In terms of expanding the ways that we communicate with each other.”*
	Internal Feedback	*“We need to get comfortable with doing it [feedback] in real time […] Because we didn't create a plan or an expectation to do it differently, we actually did nothing to change the course of action from doing the exact same thing again next week.”* *“I think it's a pretty inefficient way today, which is open up that CC field, start adding everyone else in, and hopefully somebody will latch on to this. I don't think it makes any anything happen from a change perspective.”* *“We need more precision on both remediating live issues and diagnosing them afterwards. I think there's a little bit of a hot potato thing that happens via email today. And I think feedback over email is just about never helpful unless you have a really good working relationship with someone.”* *“I wouldn't say that we have a formal process in place for that at this time.”*
	External Communication	*“Some of our top advisors will get answers a lot quicker. I think overall responsiveness is good but obviously it could use some work because we want to be able to provide a very similar level of service, no matter how valuable the advisor is to the company.”* *“There was never a set expectation around response time for when advisors are emailing you. That didn't used to be an issue when it was a smaller company and there were less advisors, but now that it's grown so much, response expectations in my opinion haven’t improved that much. You can just feel it more now.”* *“When it comes to an advisor experience in terms of them reaching out to us, we are working on reducing the number of people that they that they see as options to*

		reach out to. It's actually less efficient to have so many touchpoints."
	External Feedback	*"Advisors have sent me follow-up emails before, but it seems like more so lately, which sounds like maybe I'm the problem, but we see that that across the organization. It's needs to be addressed. I think we need to formalize procedures for that."* *The biggest issue I get feedback on from advisors is getting responses from people. That's' probably one of our bigger issues […] I'm sure more departments experience this but they just don't say anything because they probably don't know where to go with that feedback."*
Collaboration		*"As our workforce expands and disperses you don't have necessarily the sharing of ideas as readily because you're not interacting as much."* *"I do reach out to other teams but it's more so me reaching out to them and asking for their assistance and their service. Not so much of them coming to me."* *"I think because marketing has established a great efficient reputation that others come to us for questions and a lot of times things will just land in marketing and we'll do it so that things just get done."*
Cultural Factors	Department Subcultures	*"I truly think we do have such a collaborative, amazing team who works so well together and steps in when somebody needs something, and you never hear, 'that's not my job. I'm not going to do it.' You don't necessarily see that within the other departments."* (Marketing) *"I truly believe that in marketing, we are cultural leaders, and stewards of our brand. We live by our brand values, and I think that we are looked up to."* *"In Operations, there is a bit more collaboration, which leads to more cohesiveness and communication. I think a lot of that is because the department is smaller, and we just by nature do more things together."* *"We're definitely a partnership. We each have our areas where we're well versed in, so we all bring something to the table. We all know enough about different areas to be dangerous, but as a team, we work through things, which is great."* (Compliance)

	Culture Shifts	*"I felt from day one the company culture shifting. And for me, it was positive because I liked that it was becoming more 'corporate'. That meant things became more just streamlined. Before that, there was a haziness of not really having rules and procedures, which some people still love. I kind of like more clear parameters."* *"The firm that I joined five years ago is not the same one that it is today. And there are aspects of it that are definitely more corporate than they used to be."* *"Personally, I like the less corporate for a number of reasons."* *"We're trying to create a unified vision between what newer corporate culture believes in and what older family business culture believes. I truly think the mix of those two is the healthiest space to create an amazing firm."* *"I think a lot of the newer hires have a fresher memory of a traditional corporate background and so they bring a lot of that with them here."*
Brand Alignment	Brand Interpretation	*"I interpret it from an emotional side. it's family. It's people who truly care about each other."* *"Being able to deliver independence and wealth management support for our advisors and their end clients."* *"We're almost the problem solver for independent financial advisors. We inspire growth, we inspire giving back, and we inspire being advocates for the financial advice profession."* *"Our brand is centered around community around creating homes for advisors in the independent space. We are serious about the work we do but a fun place to be, to affiliate with, and to work at."* *"I would define our brand as advisor focused or advisor centric. And probably in real simple terms, advisor centric problem solvers."* *'We are trying to take away the compliance aspect to let them do their business of financial advising."*

		"We are simplifying the lives of our advisors. We're not just a compliance company, we serve our advisors lives in a lot of different avenues." *"I don't know that I have a good definition for what our brand is, other than I understand our logo."* *"I think if you asked our advisors that would be something that comes to mind: community and family. We do the right things."* *"If I go back to the infancy of the firm, it was never thought that the brand would be the leading part of consumption by an end client seeking financial services. We wanted it to be more generic and less specific. We always thought of it as a disclosure item."*
	Brand Understanding	*"People have different viewpoints and different things to say, but to have one consolidated, simple message about our brand, I think is something that I feel like we are still lacking a little bit."* *"The longer you've been here, the better understanding you have of what the company does as a whole and how that benefits the advisor. It's something that's learned over time."* *"We're not a teeny organization of five people; we're getting bigger and expanding more. So, it's about helping the new people when they come on board and educating them and going, 'here's what the here's what we strive for. Here's how we strive to brand ourselves'."* *"I hate using the term 'family feel'. It's got so many different connotations. And I think big picture it's probably not how we should be thinking about it. You can't scale that; family can't be scaled as a brand message in the direction we want to go in."*
	Brand Responsibility	*I think that some people want to show up. Others' sense of brand ownership is probably a lot different than say someone in marketing where every piece of work we do has the potential to reach the public. So, we're probably owning that more"* *"I think that marketing does 100% Great job at it. But I do fully believe that other business lines should also be doing that as well."* *"I'd say 80% leadership 20% marketing carries that. But I think that if you have a great brand on paper—which I*

		think we do—but you don't live into those values, and you have no leadership encouraging that adoption, your brand is not going to take off. To advisors, the brand is them, they are the brand, you know what I mean?" *"There's a lot going on in the industry now, that is requiring advisors to lean on the operations department of a little bit more than they used to. In that sense, I think that the brand experience that we're trying to create for them is becoming more valuable."*
	Brand Consistency	*"I imagine there is a there is a brand and living day to day versus a brand that we have on stage."* *"I believe what the market interprets is that we're a solid community of individuals. I don't know if that's what we put out there but that's what comes back. We have 3 years since changing our message against 25 years of 'we're a fun culture that has really good conferences, and we're good at people'."* *"What we're telling people we want to be known as, I'm not sure that 100% correlates to what we actually do every day. I think we're putting out what we aspire to be but our delivery of that is still subpar. And so, you've got a brand mismatch."* *"As we have grown, there is a mismatch in internal and external culture. We're telling people that they're the center of our universe, and then stuff comes in and it doesn't get processed that way. No one picks up the phone or they get bounced around, so they get the feeling that they are not the center of our universe. I think when you have that kind of brand mismatch, it's really hard to tell them what you want to be."* *"I would say there is a lack of alignment amongst different departments in terms of response timeframes or staying consistent with certain things like the way we phrase and the terms we use."* *"I do think the way and the way that we do things and to speak with our advisors has always stayed pretty true to what the overall brand is."*
Leadership	Communicating the Brand	*"I would say we have not, as an organization, done a great job of sharing our brand and core values. That conversation is not happening at the onset, and that's probably not a great start. We don't have a lot of formality and that creates some silos across the*

		organization when it comes to understanding the brand values." *"It was made pretty clear to me by leadership what our goals were and what differentiates us from every other firm. And you hear and see that—it wasn't just lip service."* *"One of my key goals, as a leader on the team, is to bring up what we're delivering to be in line with what we're saying."* *"When I joined there wasn't any formal training. I kind of learned on the spot, I think that's what everyone here has done. You really just learn from the individual employees that you're talking to. It's not like everyone gets a packet and it's up to you to read it or watch a video."* *"The challenge is how do you do this without needing a full layer of marketing on top of it with every piece of piece of media or content? I would hope that people start to absorb it themselves, other people outside of marketing."* *"I think step one is communicating at the CEO and leadership level to the full staff more often, and clarity. We shouldn't be afraid to say in front of the whole staff what I just said to you. We need to tell people what we expect. And I think where we're still acclimating."*

Appendix 3: Thematic coding of interview data and relevant quotations.

Appendix 4: Sample interview transcript.

Can you explain what the brand is and what it represents?

I imagine there is a there is a brand living day to day versus a brand that we have on stage. But if I were to mix the two, I think our brand is very centered around community around creating homes for advisors in the independent space. I think marrying that with a little bit more of our actual brand as we've curated it that we are serious about the work we do but a fun place to be, to affiliate with, and to work at. We're focused on the community for advisors, to support for advisors. I think that "we got your back" tagline comes into a lot of our messaging and conversation with advisors and then a more refreshed brand in the last couple of years, a just a just a refreshed like personality. Something a little bit less corporate, something that's a little bit more entrepreneurial and fun and flexible.

I think there are there's like adjacent themes to the theme of family orientation. Obviously, I'm a good person to ask that. I think we tend to lean into that still to this day, because it's relatable to our advisors. We want to point out as many times as possible that we look like our clients, meaning our advisors, and a lot of them have family businesses. What I mean by adjacent themes that you could say the brand caters to owner/operator/entrepreneurial. There is that concept of a family owned business and a small business. And so, while I think family doesn't necessarily need to be front and center of the definition, I think you can expand it a little bit from a family focus thing to messages that say "we know how to work with these right independent businesses that advisors have built". And one of those common themes is family business or working with close friends. So, I think family themes will have some staying power. I think strategically you can expand that as well.

Do you think that employees across the organization have a cohesive understanding of what the brand promises advisors?

I think there are challenges there. I think it's a little bit of an outcome of some growing pains. Where you have both people who have been here for 10 years and a lot who have been here for 2 to 3 years and by definition, there was a number of people not doing what they're doing a couple of years ago because they weren't even here, right, myself included. And so, I think we have the balance between being agile in what we do at the cost of under communicating. You know, to swing it all the way to the other side of the spectrum. You obviously can communicate every single thing that you do but that’s a time and resource allocation for everyone. So, I think the challenge for us that I see is how do we both stay connected without having to stop at every step and get on the phone and explain? I think there's a related challenge of how that is communicated today? I don’t want to say but there's residual habits from when we were smaller than we are today. And not that we're so big today but there is an aspect of economies of scale where if there's just five people at a firm, it's almost a waste of time to write something down versus to just knock on somebody's door next door.

Institutional knowledge is really just in those key couple of people. And at some point, I think we have passed a point where we now see the benefit to capturing some resources and processes not via phone or via zoom. I think we have a tendency still to this day that we've passed on over the years from when we were smaller in size that people have storytelling with each other. I think there is a selectivity in what we should be sharing versus a digested version. We just haven't gotten the roots in the ground on what those habits are and what works or doesn’t.

Have attempts to formalize processes been well received across the organization?
Yeah. I think I think the challenge is there is a lot of process that changes very frequently. It’s a little bit of what are you documenting? What I've just been thinking to myself is have we really provided people with effective tools for doing that? my answer right now is I don't not think there's a miracle solution, but I don't think a Word doc stored in a folder somewhere is really a great solution to documentation. I think there needs to be something a little bit more livable than that. And I think the other thing that we run into in terms of challenges is like we have bled from process documentation to defining process for other people. And I think that's really disengaging more than what process documentation as an extra administrative burden is. But I actually don't think that is the key issue in terms of adoption. I think it's when we sort of creep scope, past the “how can I help you get this down on paper” to “how can I tell you how to do your job”. And so, I think we lose people in that process too. I think I think we could do a better job of making that an energizing exercise versus at deenergizing or boxing-in exercise.

Is it ever confusion over processes and resource ownership and whether what's out there is accurate or not?

Yes. That's a great theme there and that was a product of maybe not up keeping our resource center for a while and really holding that sacred. And we've only just gone through that exercise of making sure that what is available to our advisors is high quality, accurate and up to date. There's a lot of work involved in getting that from where it was to where it is. And so that's the exact result of that where you have. So, there is a little bit of advertising that I will continue to do, I think we all need to spend a lot of effort in making this high quality. We want advisors to refer to this and trust and rely on it but also so that when we are trying to answer questions that we can point to where needs more information.

What does internal feedback look like today?

Yes, so that's one where I tend to not my sort of style or theory is that less structure is better when it comes to feedback. I don't think we've reached the size where you need to institutionalize or process some of that. I think that's an education and a training component, more so than a process or technology component. Which is a rare take by me in terms of what I usually would say about most things. I think there's a coaching and training need that helps us give each other feedback in the right way, in the right frequency, and in all directions. So, for me, I think there is there is a lot of stuff you could use from a technology perspective, but I don't think that that is the largest bang for the buck. I think I'm not totally against you know, including more of that but I think the real feedback is person to person, it's bottom up and top down at the firm. And I think it's just creating space for each other to give more feedback. And have it be honest, but not undercutting.

I think it's a pretty inefficient way today, which is open up that CC field and start adding everyone else in. And I think we have that in general whenever we see something not going where it should be. It's "let me just buckshot this to as many people across the firm that hopefully somebody latched on to this". I think we need to be a little bit more targeted. I don't think that's actually getting something remediated live. I also don't think it makes any anything happen from a change perspective. I think it just fills up everyone's email. So, I think we have a little bit too much of that today. We need more precision on both remediating live issues and diagnosing them afterwards. I think there's a little bit of a hot potato thing that happens via email today. And I think feedback over email is never helpful. Almost just about never helpful unless you have a really a really, really good working relationship with someone.

Has cross-department collaboration ever made it difficult to achieve a cohesive brand message?

I actually think [initiative X] is a good example of the brand persevering through so much different content and input. I think the challenge is how do you do that without needing a full layer of marketing on top of it with every piece of piece of media or content? But I also feel a little bit that it's a worthwhile dedication of resources for us to hit that consistency with an advisor and I would hope that people start to absorb it themselves, other people outside of marketing. But I think it's actually a great exercise in getting people intimate with what our brand is and how does that translate to their area in the firm. I think that's actually one of the benefits of this whole exercise with [initiative X]. It was necessary spending time for us all to be thinking about advisor facing content.

What were the specific mechanisms that facilitated collaboration with an end result that aligned with the brand?

I mean, I think I would love to do it in a way that wasn't so labor intensive. So, I don't want to tout it as a complete success for that reason, because you can't continually do it like that. But I do think some really simple things of like, having it content and input directed all in one place and having it look nice and be structured in a way that you can't be totally off the mark. That you're filling in the content, but that it is part of the larger painting that is our visual brand. There are just some core components to the brand that are just effectively built into the advisor facing resources. And I think that goes a long way, having people live in it and absorb that. Just from proximity alone having people be living in it as it develops, I think is pretty effective.

What do you think internal communication looks like now?

I think there is a big opportunity there. I think that is obviously a big technology opportunity. I think we potentially could be a little bit behind the times. We don't even have direct message available to us. And I mean, that's somewhat the industry as well. But you know, there are solutions available, and we just haven't picked one to run behind. I'm a little bit less focused on comms from the project updates or just email. I think some of that is fine. I don't worry too much about cohesiveness of that. I think people are allowed to have their own style. I worry about dictating too much. Maybe I'm being like too empathetic, but I do think about things in the lens of energizing and de-energizing for employees.

And we can have strategic objectives like improving our internal comms. And you could go out and say, “here's the new comm rules and this is what you'll be graded by”. But I don't think you have to give up on it being a really energizing conversation and experience for employees. So, I think that's the standard that we should be holding ourselves to when we think about how we can improve something like internal comms should be, “how can we better support teams in communicating with each other?” I think you have to get there eventually. I think we're on the first step in many ways of just making it a lot easier to be supported in communicating with each other. And another theme that you will keep hearing me say is, we do a lot over email. We do a lot of phone calls, there's other stuff in the world. And we should make a couple available but not too many, paralysis by too many choices. And, you know, see what gets adopted and kind of pick a winner. That's something that I think about a lot right now. In terms of just expanding the ways that we communicate with each other.

Is there anything that leadership can implement to ensure better consistency between what the brand promises and aspires to be and what is actually delivered on a day to day basis?
This is one of those balances between ensuring consistency of standard without completely big-brothering employees. And I think there are patches of ideas that I have around that concept. I think one that we are working on and is a relatively simple implementation. When it comes to an advisor experience in terms of them reaching out to us, reducing the number of people that they that they see as options to reach out to, it's actually less efficient to have so many touchpoints.

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