**Intro**

As technology increasingly generates vast amounts of marketing data from scanners, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. the inability to synthesize this data stream has the potential to become a disruptive factor to an organization’s strategic plans, and puts a premium on the ability to rapidly adapt to today’s dynamic business environment. In turn, the actions taken to cope with these environmental pressures impact a company’s brands, and may even impact the organization brand itself. This paper describes the Brand Flux Model, which illustrates brand management actions an organization can pursue in response to the pressures brought on by this wave of marketing information. Brand Flux is derived from the definition of “flux”, meaning a state of uncertainty preceding the establishment of a new direction of action. Brand Flux reflects the environmental uncertainty prompted by a disruption or ‘punctuated’ equilibrium, and results from an unhealthy brand audit process which results in a decision to address either the company’s brand aesthetics, or brand position, and then return to equilibrium. We define Brand Flux as “*A state where the identity, image or reputation of an organization is reinforced over long periods of time, yet with punctuated equilibrium can adapt by altering the branding and/or positioning via revitalization, refocusing, and/or renaming.*” This paper presents three case studies of service organizations that after numerous attempts to deal with environmental pressures by various forms of rebranding or repositioning made the decision to radically rename. Given the importance of a corporate or organizational brand, and the significance of the name to the brand, the study specifically explores why these organizations decided to change their names.

To the extent an organization can successfully manage the brand within the Brand Flux Model, the extremes of renaming or retirement of the organization brand is not necessary. But this recent wave of instantaneous marketing information flow and nearly instantaneous consumer awareness of issues affecting the organization brand has reduced the luxury of brand management deliberation.

**Literature Review**

Rebranding, repositioning, and renaming are not well researched (Merrilees and Miller, 2008; Kapferer, 2007; Muzellec and Lambkin, 2005). Much of the research has been targeted at the product brand level and highlighted as an opportunity to adjust a brand’s current associations (Gotsi and Andriopoulos, 2007) and in fact contributes to the misunderstanding between the use of the words rebrand, reposition and rename, not only at the product level but more importantly for this research, at the corporate level. Organizations can rebrand by altering various marketing aesthetics (logo, slogan, packaging, etc.) intended to create a new identity, or they can reposition by selecting a new target segment and focusing on crafting a new position. While much research has been conducted on rebranding and repositioning tactics at the brand level, this process at the organization level is not that clear.

The literature reveals two main approaches to the organization and promotion of corporate branding: 1.) internal identity of values/culture/vision (for example Hatch and Schultz, 2003; Balmer and Gray 2003; Ind, 2003) and 2.) external image, reputation and marketing of the brand (King, 1991; Keller, 2000; Aaker, 2004; Maathuis, 1999; Muzellec et al (2003). The corporate Brand Name is an indication of the reputation, brand identity, and corporate image of the organization as well as an indicator of the value of the organization (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Perkins, 1995; Tadelis, 1999; Aaker, 1996; Balmer, 2001; Davies and Chun, 2002) and there has been increased interest by executives to strategically manage their corporate brand name as an asset to enable growth (Schultz and de Chernatony, 2002; Balmer and Greysrer 2003; Aaker, 2004; Muzellec, 2005). A Corporate brand is targeted at multiple stakeholders, who often have different corporate associations and expectations (Hatch and Schultz, 2003), which is a significant difference between corporate branding and product branding.
It is widely acknowledged that the successful organization must manage within a continuous state of change (Gardner & Levy, 1955; Brown & Eisenhadt, 1997; Park et al., 1986; Yakimova & Beverland, 2005) in order to validate the brand’s relevance and distinctiveness (Aaker, 2011; Knox & Bickerton, 2003; Abratt & Mofoking, 2000). Blumenthal (2002) points out a branding paradox; the difficulty in providing constancy while simultaneously changing, and most research has focused on brand management under situations with no disruptive changes in company strategy, management, or ownership (Bahadir et al., 2008).

Brand audits that objectively evaluate how well a brand aligns with the strategic goals of the institution as well as the customer’s image of the institution are essential. When the results of a brand audit suggest a healthy brand the organization can sigh in relief and focus efforts and funds on reinforcing the existing brand, making sure that all marketing, advertising and service touch point efforts reinforce the strong brand; introducing campaigns that strengthen the connection of the brand to the strategic mission, firm identity, employee “ownership”, and customer image. The use of technology in marketing results in a company now being able to quickly quantify changes in the environment that impact the brand audit and the company, and allows the organization to make revitalizing adjustment decisions before the need to make rebranding, repositioning, or renaming decisions, which carry greater risks. It is when the results of an objective audit uncover an unhealthy brand that an organization must entertain the hard work of determining why the brand is not working. Most organizations with unhealthy brands will be able to embark on a revitalize or refocus strategy (as opposed to renaming or retirement) to realign their existing brand to meet their stakeholder goals. Results from revitalizing or refocusing rollout activities loop back to once again determine how closely the revitalized or refocused brand now aligns to strategic mission and goals, and whether the image their customers now have is also aligned with these strategic goals.

Given an unhealthy brand audit outcome, the literature refers to the various ways to return the brand to health as rebranding, repositioning, and renaming, but there exists much confusion. All that is consistent is that there are motivations and drivers which create a need for change, and various management strategies and tactics are employed to bring the brand back to health. Most of the literature which is referred to as rebranding focuses on the culmination of a brand audit process to “get back on track” and generally involves adjustments to change the brand marketing aesthetics or change the positioning. This study found a great deal of semantic confusion regarding this process. The literature review referred to terms such as rebranding, repositioning, redefining, realignment, restructuring, relaunching, redeployment, revisioning, etc. (see figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Rebranding literature terminology confusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>RB</th>
<th>RP</th>
<th>RN</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hervás 1992</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>erroneous repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirling et 1985</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>critical success factors</td>
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<td>Kolar 1997</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>signal</td>
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<td>HUL 2000</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>signal new direction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Larenz et 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>external factors, relationship to different targets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mazzocchi 2003</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>rebranding risk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kellerm 2003</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>weak link relationships to brand and reputation</td>
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<td>Sadiq 2004</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>change in focus</td>
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<td>DBM 2004</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate rebranding framework</td>
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<td>MEL 2006</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>adapt to changing environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jaja et al. 2006</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>rebranding, as B2B sector</td>
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<tr>
<td>Larenz 2006</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>typology of corporate rebranding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geralt 2006</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>new link to corporate rebranding process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journe 2007</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>test unknown old, then learn new position</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kapferer 2007</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>revisiting and enhance image</td>
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<tr>
<td>Y&amp;B 2007</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>typology of rebranding</td>
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<td>Sysne et al. 2007</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td></td>
<td>rebranding process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ljung 2006</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>change strategy/position</td>
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<td>Mäkitalo 2006</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>rebranding to new target segment</td>
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<td>Ghosh et al. 2008</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>responsibility for cultural alignment</td>
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<td>Vein 2006</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>rebranding motivation to peer prior reputation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moscz et al. 2009</td>
<td></td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>due to shift in S-D loc, brand-endurance abil</td>
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Many researchers are saying similar things, just using different words. While one author may describe an organization’s action of brand management as a rebranding (RB), another may describe the same type of activity as a repositioning (RP) or renaming (RN) or any of the other forms of “re” that designate a change to alter an unhealthy brand.

Research Questions
The primary research question that this study answered was: How does the corporate brand process accommodate the fluxing [change] nature of an organization, and how can a standard terminology be presented to provide clarity and avoid ongoing semantic confusion.

Methodology: Case Studies Involving Brand Flux
To answer the overall research questions, three institutions of higher education were selected and studied. The global HE marketplace is undergoing a marketization process due to competition, in part due to potentially disruptive technologies such as online delivery and student technology usage in the classroom, thus branding is becoming more important (Dill, 2003; Toma et al., 2005), and provides a field to analyze the brand flux model. Although Higher Education is a major segment of the service economy, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) point out there is a lack of theoretical models of higher education marketing; another strong reason for this research to focus on this particular service industry domain.

All three cases selected were in the U.S. higher education market, more particularly the Mid-Atlantic Region. All were private institutions. Each was in the same range of student size, functional designation, and all were residential schools, and to some extent they were competitors for the same students and stakeholders. The most critical criteria was the fact that each institution had recently undertaken a renaming as opposed to a designation change.

The research design was a semi-structured, qualitative, multiple-case study format that incorporated open-ended interview questions with 46 stakeholders from three separate HE institutions and secondary research data from printed documents, web sites and outside media sources. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded, and analyzed. Secondary research from printed documents, correspondence, web sites, books, publications, reports and outside media sources supplemented the interviews. Through extensive preliminary research and detailed queries, observations and analysis of three case studies, the brand flux model was proposed, tested and adopted at these cases.

Findings and Discussion
Upon the synthesis of the rebranding, repositioning and renaming literature and the insight gained from the three case studies, a descriptive Brand Flux Model was developed illustrating five stages of brand management: Reinforce, Revitalize, Refocus, Rename, and Retire (figure A below). The brand flux model expands upon previous brand management descriptions and models (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006; Keller, 1999; Jevons et al., 2007), and combines the processes associated with actions variously described in terms such as revitalizing, rebranding, realignment, restructuring, relaunching, repositioning, revisioning, and renaming into a simple coherent descriptive model.

In the Brand Flux model (Figure 2) the X axis ‘Change in Branding’ refers to changes in marketing aesthetics such as logo, slogan, packaging, etc. intended to create a new identity and are designed to alter the image of the brand with the consumer. The Y axis represents ‘Changes in Positioning’ of an organization, i.e. targeting a different market segment. Organizations that implement more substantial changes in branding combined with minimal changes in position are shown in the model as Rebrand, while organizations that implemented more substantial changes in position along with minimal changes in branding aesthetics are portrayed as Reposition, with gradients in between. These rebranding and repositioning actions are referred to as “refocusing”, as they are more substantial than a revitalization of the brand. Thus the Brand Flux descriptive model can clarify all
the various brand management terms and activities in relation to Changes in Branding (X axis) or Changes in Positioning (Y axis). Note there is no path depicting Retirement, since unlike if the corporate name is retired (merger or shutdown) there is no Reinforce necessary.

![Brand Flux Model](image)

**Figure A Brand Flux Model (Author)**

In this work we use the term renaming to mean “radical renaming”, a situation where an organization has changed its name in a semantically different way in order to affect its identity, image and soul; to impart new meaning, and to imply new qualities beyond the literal word. For the purposes of this study renaming is defined as “An action which changes identity as a means to alter image in order to create utility through the sharing of names that have been learned and graded.”

All three cases were renamed not as a result of a large financial donation (benefactor) nor because of a merger, thus the decision to rename was strictly a strategic choice due to brand flux.

Over the years prior to the three HEI cases radically renaming they had instituted a series of rebranding or repositioning activities in order to deal with various outside pressures such as declining enrollment, admitting opposite genders, or breaking from religious organizations. In particular, one case found that after 150 years the internet technology wave was seriously negatively impacting enrollment since their name (Beaver College) was being blocked by high school filtering software due to its pornographic associations. Sometimes the actions solved their problems, other times the market growth muted the severity of the problems. In all three cases after the rebranding, repositioning, or revitalization efforts the organization returned to reinforcing actions to maintain brand health. Thus a company can react to a change in the environment which upsets the equilibrium by minimally changing the branding and/or positioning (revitalize) and then return to reinforcing activities. Other environmental changes may, as mentioned, prompt the more substantial action of rebranding or repositioning (refocus) followed by reinforcing actions. This movement from reinforce to revitalize and back to reinforce; from reinforce to refocus and then back to reinforce, and all variations in between may occur over a long period of time, and in more minor or major terms depending upon the organizational strategy and the environment. The arrows in the Brand Flux Model represent this back and forth brand management activity.

In the cases studied the institutions spent over 30 years moving from refocusing cycles from rebrand to reinforce or reposition to reinforce, in an effort to meet the strategic goals of the organization. However, the board of trustees, executive administration and various stakeholders continued to raise
the issue of a radical renaming to deal with the issues. Ultimately when Refocus actions were unsuccessful a decision to rename was undertaken, after which the organizations returned again to reinforce the new brand and position with the new name.

**Summary of Key Findings and Conclusion**

This study acknowledged the need for brand management and concluded that if brand management within an HEI service organization as a component of the Brand Flux Model is ongoing, and the brand identity that the institution believes that it is promoting and projecting is indeed consistent with the brand image held by the stakeholders, radical renaming should not be necessary unless extenuating circumstances exist since renaming is costly both in tangible and intangible aspects and should not be underestimated or over-prescribed. Those case organizations that understood the importance of branding and brand management to the marketization of their HEI budgeted more time and resources to the renaming process which contributed to establishing their new brand identity. This study also concluded that renaming as part of the Brand Flux Model is not a discrete event, rather a continuous realignment by brand-supportive firms operating in a generative learning situation to positively reflect the fundamentals of brand management. This empirical qualitative study documented the importance of a looped corporate brand management cycle process to optimize the value inherent in a corporate brand from the viewpoint held by the consumers (stakeholders) but implemented by the organization, and is the first to incorporate rename and retire as part of the cycle. Using the brand audit as the trigger in the brand flux model the renaming process highlights the value in the continuous strategic realignment necessary to follow through and create brand value in the new name after renaming.

As an understudied area, this primary research contributes to the understanding of the role of branding as a growth platform for service organizations; the management of the brand flux process by reducing terminology confusion; and new research on renaming. For practitioners, this study provides insight into channels for optimal corporate strategy through making a change in branding or change in position in order to revitalize, refocus (rebrand and reposition) or even rename and then reinforce those decisions to maintain brand health by developing a model to assist in brand management and renaming scenarios.
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