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Celling The Concept: A Study of Managerial Brand Mindsharing of A Distributed Biobanking Research Infrastructure

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ABSTRACT
This interview study investigates how managers/associates of a failed distributed large-scale Research Infrastructures perceived their brand and the role mindsharing played in light of the organisation’s ultimate failure. Specifically, the study looks at BioBanking and Molecular Resource Infrastructure in Sweden (BBMRI.se), an organisation that involved collaboration between several medical and technical universities and sought to harmonise biobanking in Sweden. The aim was to discern the respondents’ degree of mindsharing in regards to their perception of the organisational brand. The four stages the branding process investigated were: Brand Strategic Analysis, Brand Identity, Brand Operationalising, and Post-Implementation Reflections. The results indicated that the mindsharing was present at the initial two stages, but dissipated throughout the ensuing two final stages, resulting in a fragmented brand perception, thereby forgoing the ability of generating a “pull-effect” for the BBMRI.se brand. The study’s implication is for branding to account more for social and individual motivations and less for instrumental motivations, e.g. mission statements.

KEYWORDS
Biobanking; branding; marketing; mindshare; public sector; research infrastructure

Introduction

Research and technological development have long been seen as major drivers for creating knowledge and improving welfare around the globe (Mokyr, 2002). Hence, the complexity of science has created collaborations as well as a need to strengthen innovative capabilities (Mumuni et al., 2016; Stokols, Hall, Taylor, & Moser, 2008). This has led to multidisciplinary collaborations and coordinated Research Infrastructures aiming to serve broad scientific communities while fostering scientific excellence (Muldur et al., 2006). A Research Infrastructure refers (by common practice rather than by standard definition) to a facility, resource and/or a related service
used by the scientific community to conduct top-level research (OECD, 2010, 2014a, 2014b; Stahlecker & Kroll, 2013). Moreover, they seek to foster a *milieux innovateurs* (Locke, Bieschke, Castonguay, & Hayes, 2012; Moulaert & Sekia, 2003). As such, Research Infrastructures can be *single-sited, digital*, or *distributed* (Pérez-Llantada, 2012; Sumathipala, 2014). The lattermost is the most intricate of the three aforementioned types of Research Infrastructures as it entails involvement from several different actors at several different locations. Nevertheless, most previous research done on Research Infrastructures has focussed on the digital type of Research Infrastructure (Benardou, Champion, Dallas, & Hughes, 2017; Kao & Decou, 2003). For this reason, there remains a general lack of research on distributed Research Infrastructures (Larsson, 2017; OECD, 2014a).

Due to their emerging nature, branding is becoming an increasingly more important factor for Research Infrastructures (Cooper, Junginger, & Lockwood, 2009; Craig, 2013). However, in order for a brand name to become established, the organisation must ensure integration via a shared vision, or understanding, that manages all decisions and operations (Chad, 2016; Franzen & Moriarty, 2008). Hence, a shared brand vision effectively anchors not just the marketing aspect, but rather all business decisions, particularly in the non-profit/public sector (Hanson, 2002; Smith, 2001). Previous studies have shown that the top management of an organisation will generally share the same vision(s) (Vinthor, Jensen, Hjelmager, Lyhne, & Nøhr, 2017). Therefore it is important for the staff to share the same sense of direction for the organisation and a similar appreciation for the organisation’s narrative/storytelling (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005). Nevertheless, while additional studies have shown how the interaction between organisational cultures affect the corporate brand, they have all stopped short of investigating the perceptions of the organisational brand among those in charge and its impact on the organisation (Chapleo, 2015; De Chernatony & Cottam, 2008; Hytti, Kuoppakangas, Suomi, Chapleo, & Giovanardi, 2015).

An area that has seen a growing use for Research Infrastructures is biobanking (Lawlor, 2017). In short, a biobank is best described as a collection of samples of human body material that is connected with genetic data and/or health data from patients or donors, or in general, associated personal data (Larsson, 2017; Lenk, Sándor, & Gordijn, 2011). Still, no universally applicable definitions exist and standards and procedures vary from biobank to biobank, which has led to a need for establishing a common practice through harmonisation (Betsou, 2017; Dricu, 2018; Vaught & Lockhart, 2012). In order to investigate the developments of this area further, this study has conducted a case study of BioBanking and Molecular Resource Infrastructure in Sweden (BBMRI.se), the Swedish node of BioBanking and Molecular Resource Infrastructure (BBMRI). This was an initiative aimed at harmonising non-profit/non-commercial research
biobanks (Beier & Schnorrer, 2011). BBMRI.se was selected as a case, given its unique construction as a large-scale distributed Research Infrastructure in biobanking as well as being the (to date) largest Swedish investment in a medical Research Infrastructure (Swedish Research Council, 2009). It was hosted by Sweden’s largest medical university and involved all other Swedish medical universities, as well as one polytechnic university. The cornerstones of the organisation was its Work Packages (WP), which specialised in different areas of biobanking research in an autonomous manner (Norlin, Fransson, Eaker, Elinder, & Litton, 2012; Swedish Research Council, 2009).

Notwithstanding, in December 2015 some major financial and organisational disagreements between the host university and some of the other member universities surfaced (Hallmans, Beskow, Larson, & Grankvist, 2015; Karolinska Institutet, 2016). The disagreements ultimately led to the Swedish Research Council announcing its withdrawal of additional funding in March 2016 (save for a 2-year decommissioning grant), effectively leaving BBMRI.se to perish of its own accord (Swedish Research Council, 2016). In 2017, Biobank Sverige [Eng. Biobank Sweden], a new biobank harmonisation initiative, was announced, with financial support from the Swedish Research Council (Eaker, 2017; Government Offices of Sweden, 2017). This was a new biobank infrastructure hosted by Uppsala University, which would successively integrate the remnants of BBMRI.se along with national biobank NGOs, regional counties, industry representatives and interest groups (Biobank Sverige, 2017; Nordin, 2017). BBMRI.se officially ceased existing on April 1, 2018, when its final mandate expired (Larsson, Savage, Brommels, & Mattsson, 2018).

On this note, a salient issue is how managers of a failed distributed large-scale Research Infrastructures perceived their brand, if the managers can indeed share visions in such an organisational environment, and to what extent this can be attributed to the organisation’s ultimate failure (Anisimova & Mavondo, 2015; Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander, & Laine, 2011). “Large-scale” is, for the purposes of this study, defined as a Research Infrastructure with a total financing cost of at least €1,000,000 (including the non-refundable portion of VAT) (FWO, 2015). In this context, BBMRI.se received an initial funding of approximately €15.5 Million from the Swedish Research Council (Swedish Research Council, 2009).

Given the fact that distributed Research Infrastructures are severely under-researched, and especially so in terms of branding, this study seeks to further the understanding and development of branding policies and strategies for extant and future large-scale Research Infrastructures (Larsson, 2017). Moreover, there is (to the best of the author’s knowledge) no available literature on managerial brand perception/shared vision within large-scale distributed Research Infrastructures (Melvin, Edwards, Malone, Hassell, &
Wilfond, 2013; Vuorio, 2017). This means there is a research gap in extant literature and a lack of a precedent for future distributed Research Infrastructures (Albert & Siedlecki, 2016).

**Literature Review**

A “brand” is best defined as a “name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Kotler, 1997, p. 443). Thus, organisations build brands in order to distil their corporate identity (Balmer, 2010; Urde & Greyser, 2015). The perception of a brand may determine the success factor of an organisation and recent studies have shown that healthcare organisations may be especially susceptible (Indounas & Arvaniti, 2015).

First, however, it is essential to clarify the concepts. *Marketing* and *branding* are often used interchangeably. There is, however, an important distinction. *Marketing* refers to the concept of actively promoting a product or service. It constitutes a “push” factor because it promotes a message in order to achieve sale results. *Branding* precedes and underlies the marketing effort. It is a “pull” factor as it passively encourages consumers to buy a product, or enlist a service, without directly asking them to do so. While marketing may contribute to a brand, a brand conceptually supersedes any marketing effort and is what remains after a marketing campaign has passed (Heaton, 2011).

Hence, it is important to establish a brand that is perceived in the manner it is intended to be. To this end, *brand perception* is a crucial factor. This symbolises an actor’s intuitive mental image of what the brand represents. It is distinguishable from *brand identification*, which symbolises how well a certain actor identifies with a certain brand and to what extent the brand reinforces a personal identity (Dunn, 2004). A concretisation of this is *mindshare branding*, which seeks to establish a common notion within a concept so that it is experienced/perceived in a similar fashion by all involved parties (Holt, 2004). In this way, mindsharing may denote how a company brand is collectively perceived amongst the employees (Holt, 2004; Matiatou, 2015). Mindshare branding relies on tacit, abstract associations in the individual’s mind that are perceived in a similar, or identical, fashion from person to person (Heding, Knudtzen, & Bjerre, 2016). It sometimes refers to customers’ perception of a specific brand, but it can also refer to how staff and/or stakeholders perceive a company brand (Gill, 2013). As such, brand perception is, especially in the case of organisations, largely contingent on symbolic, non-product, characteristics (Bravo, Montaner, & Pina, 2012; O’Cass & Frost, 2002).
A brand’s mindshare may be compared across different segments (Acuña, 2012; Krishnan, Sullivan, Groza, & Aurand, 2013). To this end, there are several segments/stages involved in consolidating a brand forming experience. Drawing upon Aaker (1996) and Azevedo’s (2005) brand model, a successful brand must be able to separate itself from other brands by reflecting its identity in a manner that resonates in a comparable manner throughout the organisation.

An initial step to this extent is **Brand Strategic Analysis** as proposed by Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), which considers the analysis of underlying market drivers for the brand as crucial (e.g. the needful aspects for build a brand in that particular space). This notion has in turn been supported by much of the subsequent literature in the area (Cravens & Piercy, 2013; Ghodeswar, 2008).

The next step is **Brand Identity**, which refers to the disposition of brand and the values it embodies (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). To this extent, this step looks at the individual’s desired positioning of the brand rather than its *de facto* positioning (or perception thereof) (De Chernatony & Dall’Olmo Riley, 1998; Kapferer, 2012).

The following step is **Brand Operationalising**, which looks at the concrete measures taken towards forming the brand. Such actions are multidisciplinary and holistic in nature and involve factors such as various forms of interactions, activities and operations (Davis & Dunn, 2002; Upshaw & Taylor, 2000; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005).

The final step is **Post-Implementation Reflection**, which is a form of self-analysis where the organisation is internally analysed by looking at how the outcome variables matched the initial ambitions (Aaker, 1996). The outcomes of this step may elucidate the results for assisting future strategies/approaches (Cravens & Piercy, 2013). To this end, this step can lead to alterations on extant brand strategies, the formation of new brands and/or the discontinuation of existing brands.

**Figure 1.** Four-stage process of branding and mindshare building. Mindsharing must occur through all stages in order to be fully achieved. Synthetisation of Aaker (1996), Azevedo (2005) and Holt (2004).
In order for a full mindshare to be achieved, it must exist throughout all the stages of the brand building process (Acuña, 2012; Almquist & Roberts, 2000). Thus, these processes can be synthesised in Figure 1:

Note however, that failure to attain mindsharing at any stage does not mean that the brand formation process is aborted. The brand will continue to form, but the mindsharing attributes will be damaged, or even scuttled.

Method

Design, Sample and Data Collection

As a qualitative, interview study, the study sought to understand a specific case used as a representation of a Research Infrastructure (King & Horrocks, 2010; Yin, 2017). Given the study’s nature as an ex-post facto study, the respondents were not influenced by the researcher (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2017; Silva, 2010).

Data was gathered from interviews. The nature of the interviews was semi-structured, using open-ended questions. This permitted the respondents to narrate the course of events as they perceived/remembered (Bryman & Bell, 2015). At the outset, the author used a first draft of the interview guide in order to instigate a pilot interview with a senior researcher. This was done to ensure an adequate length, pacing and general comprehensibility of the interview and the questions. Subsequently, a final interview guide was drafted following the outcome of the pilot interview.

Purposive sampling was used to select the pertinent interviewees (Oliver, 2006; Ryan, 2010). The criteria for selecting the respondents’ were that they had executive positions and that they had been actively involved, directly or indirectly, in forming BBMRI.se and/or operated in a prominent position.

Initially, a request for interview participation, outlining the purpose of the study, was sent via email to each respondent, to which the participating interviewees accepted. The suggested venues for the interviews were the interviewees’ work places, except otherwise requested. This resulted in one interview conducted at a different venue than the respondent’s workplace and one other interview being conducted by phone. The interviewees were asked to provide testimony of the time period covered by this study, namely the outset of biobank harmonisation in Sweden up till the consolidation of a Research Infrastructure (circa 2001 to March 2013). Complementary questions were asked around each topic. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim using the software Audacity (Version 2.0.0) and Transcribe! (Version 8.31.0).

Table 1 presents a view of the respondents (presented with fictitious names) interviewed in this study.
Table 1. List of respondents representing different functions in establishing the BBMRI.se Research Infrastructure. The respondents known under the fictitious names “Jon-Derek” and “Hans” were contacted to participate in this study but either declined or refused to respond.

| Respondent     | Gender | Academic Credentials                                                                 | Position                                                                 |
|----------------|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| “Joachim”      | M      | Professor of Infection Epidemiology (Prev. professor of Virology)                      | BBMRI.se Director, Co-founder. Leader of multiple work packages          |
| “Georg”        | M      | Professor of Nutrition Medicine & specialist in Clinical Pathology                    | Co-founder, work package leader                                         |
| “Rolph”        | M      | Professor of Molecular Medicine                                                      | Work package leader, inventor and multiple medical patent-holder         |
| “Matt”         | M      | Ph.D. in antibiotic resistance in hospital bacteria                                   | Biobank Executive Director, work package leader                         |
| “Maarten”      | M      | Ph.D. in Medical Epidemiology and Biostatistics                                       | BBMRI.se work package leader, Project coordinator                       |
| “Annie”        | F      | Ph.D. in Medical Genetics                                                             | BBMRI.se Deputy-Director, Biobank Director, work package leader          |
| “Sophia”       | F      | Ph.D. in Medical Epidemiology                                                        | President of NBR (Swedish National Biobank Council), affiliated to Uppsala University |
| “June”         | F      | Professor of Biostatistics                                                           | Secretary general for Research Infrastructures at the Swedish Research Council. External actor |
| “Nena”         | F      | Professor of Cardiology                                                              | Chairman of the board in SBU (Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services). External actor |

| Non-Respondents|        |                                                                                      |                                                                         |
|----------------|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| “Jon-Derek”    | M      | Professor of Epidemiology                                                            | Former BBMRI.se Director, Co-founder, work package leader               |
| “Hans”         | M      | Professor of Biomedical Ethics                                                       | BBMRI.se work package leader                                            |

Data Analysis

This study applied a qualitative, directed content analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Schreier, 2012). The study ultimately disclosed different patterns after utilising rigorous theme development and revision (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Official designations and translations of abbreviations have been used wherever applicable. The all other necessary translations have been made by the author.

In order to analyse patterns across data sets and explain the branding phenomenon of BBMRI.se, this study has utilised an adapted model of the interpreted synthetisation of the notions of brand building and mindshare formation as presented by Aakers (1996), Azevedo (2005) and Holt (2004) as presented in Figure 1. The model outlines four stages, or themes, of perceived brand formation based on how the respondents have viewed the formation of BBMRI.se and what it represents to them. In turn, each stage contains...
different sub-themes that seek to tether out recurring topics and how the
respondents relate to them.
Specifically, “Brand Strategic Analysis” seeks to answer the question “why do
I/we need/want this?” It aims to establish the underlying drivers, or rationale
among the respondents for wanting to commit to the BBMRI.se initiative.
“Brand Identity” seeks to answer “what is this brand all about?” It aims to
probe the respondents’ conception of the brand identity and what values they
believe it embodies in reality.
“Brand Operationalising” seeks to answer “how do I/we go about building
this brand?” It aims to discern the perceived actions/ambitions in realising
the brand, or what factors that that has impeded it.
“Post-Implementation Reflections” seeks to answer “how did I/we do?” As
such, it aims to discern how the respondents feel about the brand building
with the benefit of hindsight, i.e. what worked well and what could have been
done differently.
In order to develop familiarity with the source material and identify the
functions of the respondents, the author read through the compiled interview
data numerous times. It turned out some respondents had multiple duties/roles
within the BBMRI.se depending on their functions. Meaning units from
each interview corresponding to the aforementioned four themes were iden-
tified, placed in a spreadsheet table, and then issued an identification code.
The codes were grouped and recurrent concepts were identified and listed as
sub-themes through an iterative process, meaning it contained both inductive
and deductive elements (Grbich, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).
Specifically, it was deductive inasmuch that the themes were in parts inspired
by similar pre-existing analytical frameworks. The sub-themes, however,
were inductive as they emerged in accordance with the responses of the
interviewees.

**Ethical Considerations**

Preceding the interviews, the respondents were once again briefed about the
research’s purpose and the premise of the interview. Informed consent was
acquired from all respondents, along with an opportunity to withdraw their
participation (Watts, 2008). This study has not evaluated any of the actions
and/or decisions made by the interviewees. The project plan was vetted for
ethical review by the Stockholm Regional Ethical Review Board (2012). The
names of the interviewees have been withheld in order to conceal their
identity as per AoIR (Ess & AoIR Ethics Working Committee, 2002). That
is to say, while someone motivated enough to take the effort to discern the
authentic identities of the interviewees can most certainly do so, the withheld
names will ensure that the respondents are not directly associated to this
study should anyone search for their authentic names on a search engine (Madge, 2012).

**Study Context**

Sweden has traditionally had a favourable social and political climate for medical scientific research, which has resulted in Sweden taking on a leading role in the development of biobanking (Glennerster & Kremer, 2000; McCloy & Stone, 2001; Sweden.se, 2018).

Biobanking has historically suffered from problems related to various legal issues and underutilisation and information accessibility (Langhof, Kahrass, Sievers, & Strech, 2017). For this reason there have been numerous attempts made since the early 2000s to initiate biobank harmonisation, although none of these were designed to be sustainable beyond a few years and were generally limited to specific geographic regions (Nobel, 2008). At that point, the Swedish Research Council acknowledged there was a need for a Research Infrastructure in order to bring harmonisation to the biobanks (Nobel, 2008). One step in this direction was setting up two preparatory infrastructures in 2006 called *Database Infrastructure Committee* (DISC) and *Biobank Infrastructure Committee* (BISC) (Nobel, 2008). The chief aim of DISC was to promote the development of an effective infrastructure that would provide scientists with swift access to high quality data by coordinating databases (Axelsson & Schroeder, 2009). Additionally, the aim of BISC was to harmonise the biobank databases, as opposed to merely collecting and cross-checking results in one large database. BISC was designed to have strong coordination with DISC, with the ultimate goal of integrating the two (Nobel, 2008).

Simultaneously, there was also much activity on the European supranational scene. In 2001, the Council of Ministers concluded that a European approach to Research Infrastructures was needed and invited the European Commission (in close cooperation with Member States) to investigate the need for new solutions. To this end, an expert group was formed, and its findings led to the foundation of the *European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures* (ESFRI) in 2002 (Stahlecker & Kroll, 2013). ESFRI developed a strategic *Roadmap* in 2006 that outlined a vision for supranational Research Infrastructures (ESFRI, 2006; Stahlecker & Kroll, 2013). One project that ESFRI presented in accordance with this vision was BBMRI, established in 2008 (Vuorio, 2017). The ambition was for BBMRI to pioneer a large-scale European Research Infrastructure for high-quality, biomedically relevant, sample collections (Chen, 2013). The first tasks were to inventory existing biobanks and establish a common framework for sample harmonisation and classification (Swedish Research Council, 2009). BBMRI was designed to exist
as different national nodes across the EU-countries. Its Swedish node, BBMRI.se, was founded in 2009, following an “Operation Grant” application to the Swedish Research Council (2009). BBMRI.se would involve all seven Swedish medical universities and one engineering school (BBMRI.se, 2015). The largest medical university became the host university, as per the funding agreement with the Swedish Research Council (Waara, 2012).

Also, in 2009, a legal entity called ERIC (European Research Infrastructure Consortium) was launched (European Commission, 2009; Granieri & Renda, 2012). An ERIC is a consortium, as opposed to an EU-agency. This entails that rather than being part of the Member States, it is an international organisation established by a verdict from the Commission. This in turn originates from an application submitted by three or more Member States (Lind & Reichel, 2013). The aim was to put EU research policy into effect by creating a superior Research Infrastructure that would advance on an international level (Calzolari, Napolitano, & Bravo, 2013). Through an ERIC consortium, the Member States may collectively fund and manage Research Infrastructures in a manner that would otherwise be impossible of the Member State’s own accord (Schofield et al., 2010).

The idea was that BBMRI would continue conceptually in the same manner with national nodes in each member countries, but as an ERIC-entity under the name BBMRI-ERIC (which would serve as a European, overarching, node). To this effect, BBMRI-ERIC was finally set up in 2013 as one of the first ERIC infrastructures (Brosset & Mahalatchimy, 2017; Pollak, 2016). Hence, BBMRI.se became the first national node to be established, with several other European countries following suit (Dillner, 2015). However, a confusing factor in this development was the co-existence of the Swedish National Biobank Council (NBR), an NGO that had issued its own set of definitions along with information on relevant regulations, geared towards the biobanking community (Johansson, 2015).

Notwithstanding, BBMRI.se’s ambition was to harmonise biobanking processes while establishing efficient and internationally leading nationwide biobanking infrastructure (BBMRI.se, 2015). BBMRI.se engaged and incorporated leading experts in eight different WPs (Swedish Research Council, 2009). To this end, the BBMRI.se strategy document defined the organisation’s main goal as follows (BBMRI.se, 2015, p. 4):

“…to create a harmonised, efficient and internationally leading nationwide biobanking infrastructure that will provide a long-term, strategic support for Swedish medical research, healthcare and biomedical industry. The BBMRI.se infrastructure will provide a comprehensive state-of-the-art service to researchers, both regarding sample collection for biobanking projects, as well as regarding assistance with exploitation of biobanks for research. BBMRI.se will develop and provide the tools and the expertise required for creating new valuable sample collections as well as for improving accessibility and usefulness of already existing sample collections.”
In summary, BBMRI.se had (officially) sought to present itself as a one-stop shop with leading national and international competence with cutting-edge technology.

**Empirical Findings**

As per the model in Figure 1, there are four relevant themes upon which various sub-themes and categories can be built illustrating the development of the various processes and mechanisms involved in the perceived brand building. These are: “Brand Strategic Analysis,” “Brand Identity,” “Brand Operationaliaing,” and “Post-Implementation Reflections.” Through thematic grouping, this study was able to identify a total of 23 sub-themes. To this extent, the four themes have been presented with sample quotations from different respondents in order to convey some of the points discerned.

The emerged themes and sub-themes of the extracted interview data, along with the synthesis, are summarised in Figure 2.

**Brand Strategic Analysis**

The initial uncovered sub-theme was Suboptimal current biobanking. The main reason the respondents took an initial interest to the BBMRI.se brand was because it seen as remedy to the existing problems of biobanking research, specifically that it was too costly (“Matt”). “June” argued that the healthcare’s biobanks needed to be integrated, while adding that Sweden’s ability to achieve biobank harmonisation could be done more cost efficiently in Sweden as opposed to other countries. A complicating factor was the fact that there existed “conflicting terminological definitions” between different biobank organisations (“June”), such as NBR, with “Sophia” adding that there was a need to start an overarching biobank organisation as having multiple would have been unsustainable.

The next sub-theme was Ambition to strengthen research competitiveness. “Joachim” believed that there was a need to strengthen Swedish competitiveness in biobank research. “Annie” argued along the same lines, stressing the importance of Europe (and Sweden) keeping up with rapid development in India, China and the United States. “Matt” accentuated the need for superior biobanking infrastructure. “Georg” echoed a similar sentiment, emphasising the need to “create world-leading infrastructures.” “Rolph” believed it there was a need to make biobank research “better and more standardised.”

The following sub-theme was Standardise research. A driver for establishing BBMRI.se was the need to “facilitate research” and making it
“standardised (“Georg”) inasmuch that scientists could turn to a “one-stop shop” for all aspects of their biobank research (“Joachim”). The main ambition was to achieve common practice by means of “soft harmonisation” rather than “standardisation,” which meant that each actor would use translatable/compatible tools/practices through collaboration rather than enforcing identical standards for all participants (“Maarten”). This would be a way to integrate the biobanks across the healthcare (“Annie” and “June”). To this

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**Figure 2.** Chart depicting the synthetisation of the respondent’s view into different themes.
end, a common biobank infrastructure needed to be built (“Nena”). Moreover, “Rolph” and “June” stressed the importance of ensuring superior methods in order to organise population-based studies.

The next sub-theme was *Unclear motives*. The purposes of establishing an organisation such as BBMRI.se was not clear to all of the respondents. For instance, “Nena” stated that she was “at a loss” when it came to understanding biobank structures and that there was a “complicated view” of the involved actors, while “Annie” claimed that she “had no idea what the central ideas/purpose” were for the BBMRI.se infrastructure.

The final sub-theme, *Self-serving motives*, showed that financial incentives influenced the creation of BBMRI.se and that “Jon-Derek,” one of the BBMRI.se architects at the host university, levied financial pressure against some of the other member universities to coerce them into joining BBMRI.se (“Annie”). This was due to “Jon-Derek’s” main purpose of consolidating an “empire building perspective,” where the emphasis was placed on his own prestige (“Nena”).

**Brand Identity**

The first sub-theme was *Inclusive*. That is to say, several respondents contended that the ambition of building the brand identity was to create a sense of “inclusiveness.” “June” stated that some initial work had included the arrangements of different “hearings” that brought the leading scientists together. “Joachim” stressed the importance of discussing and interacting with the different decision makers and stakeholders. “Rolph” argued that it was important not to “standardise too rigidly,” but rather to help participants not to “re-invent the wheel.” “Annie” said she had discussed “how to make collaboration easier across national borders,” while also stressing the need for BBMRI.se’s management to “function as an anchor for collaboration and cooperation.”

Conversely, the following sub-theme was *Excluding*, and highlighted some of the instances in which the BBMRI.se brand had acted in an exclusionary manner. Most ostensibly, this had been an issue in regards to the county/hospital biobanks, who were not included in the BBMRI.se collaboration. “June” believed that including them would be a “big challenge,” while “Nena” said that the discussion concerning the county’s inclusion had been “adversely affected” during” the formation of BBMRI.se. “Annie,” on her part, stated she had “difficulty to understand distinction between county and academy biobanks” while contending that “Jon-Derek” and “Joachim” had been too forceful in their attempts, even financially threatening her institution’s biobank and insisted it join BBMRI.se without any financial compensation. In addition, they had also threatened that “Rolph” and “Hans” (both of whom belonged to “Annie’s”
institution) would not receive their funding if “Annie” did not agree, resulting in further pressure from “Hans” and him being furious with “Annie” for several years afterwards. She also added that NBR had expressed a desire to cooperate with BBMRI.se but that the sentiment had not been reciprocated.

This was followed by *Engaging researchers as stakeholders* as a sub-theme. Thus, the participating scientists were seen as stakeholders of BBMRI.se as they created BBMRI.se with the universities’ approval (“Georg”). This was in a sense manifested in the fact that the scientists took their previous experiences and tried to implement them into the BBMRI.se WPs (“Matt”). “Rolph” even stated that he had suggested doing something similar to BBMRI.se before it was founded, while “Joachim” wanted to take the endeavor one step further by suggesting that BBMRI.se would service centres spread across the country with different scientists stationed at each service station.

The next sub-theme was *Quality assurance*. “Georg” stressed the importance of implementing “quality assurance” as part of an iterative process based on the extant experiences with BBMRI.se. To this end much work was put into implementing the information models for biobanks, while taking meticulous care to describe all the WPs in order to secure future funding (“Maarten”). “Matt” added that he had converted his understanding of his WP into a five-year plan for his team as a mean of assuring quality. Moreover, BBMRI.se had before its inception been carefully prepared partially through a preparatory project in the EU (“Annie”) and the Swedish Research Council had established BISC, which introduced many of the researchers to each other (“Sophia”).

The subsequent sub-theme was *Streamlining processes*. “Joachim” said that the larger idea of BBMRI.se was to “serve a customer,” which would ultimately entail more service-providing functions while removing/reducing the investigative functions. “June” said “biobank research was important to cure pathologies” and stressed the importance of coordination as it “could make biobanking more effective in Sweden.”

The following sub-theme was *An ambition to do what prior actors had failed to do*. “Annie” contended that biobanks were constantly being mentioned in the national reports; hence they represented a viable area. “June” added that there had been some earlier harmonisation initiatives that did not seek to achieve the same scope of harmonisation as BBMRI.se did.

The last sub-theme was *Based on existing European design*. BBMRI.se was a brand name specifically chosen as the intent was for other countries to follow and establish their own national nodes/iterations of the organisation (“Rolph”). Thus, it was originally an EU-initiative on an international level with clear-set goals of harmonisation (“Annie”) that served as a structural
Prototype listed in ESFRI’s Roadmap (“June”), and hence the WPs were largely defined already in BBMRI.se’s original application (“Maarten”).

**Brand Operationalising**

The first sub-theme was *Engaging all stakeholders*. In terms of concrete actions taken in order to build the brand name, “Joachim” stressed the importance of communicating with individuals on several different layers, even those “working the floor,” processing the samples, as well as with those in managerial roles. To this end, he had enlisted approximately 30 “key opinion leaders,” who were renowned scientists in their field, to act as a “dominant view” around different venues where they would spread information about the uses of a harmonised biobanking system. “Georg’s” understanding was that the legitimacy of the BBMRI.se brand would be secured through the implementation of a “Scientific Council” that would consist of representatives from the member universities ensuring full consensus of the organisational processes. “June” however, stressed the need of working towards achieving interoperability between the academy and healthcare. Conversely, “Rolph” was personally active in the industry, and referred to himself as a “stakeholder” there. Hence, he thought that the industry was an important actor to reach out to as “they may have new techniques.” “Annie” believed the healthcare’s competence was superior to that of the host university but added that BBMRI.se’s management discredited her team “as soon as they got the chance” whenever she tried to influence any of the other actors outside BBMRI.se. To this end, “June” argued that BBMRI.se should develop in congruence with the international biobanks, so that Sweden did not “create its own niche.” In terms of “National Champions,” “Joachim” stated that in the original BBMRI.se application, they were defined as leading experts who were proficient in all aspects involved in building and operating a biobank. “June” added that many of these scientists had been invited to various harmonisation initiatives abroad before BBMRI.se has begun.

The subsequent sub-theme was *Leading infrastructures*. “Georg” said his WP had presented world leading infrastructures in writing. “Matt” contended that BBMRI.se was about “efficient operations” while “Annie” said that the physical facility was “all about offering national service for biobanking.”

This was followed by the sub-theme *Ambiguous structure*. “Rolph” contended that the WPs were “fairly autonomous,” a notion seconded by “Maarten,” who said he would represent his WP towards external stakeholders and would seek to structure his team’s activities. “Georg” felt there was confusion in regards to how the structure should have looked. “Matt” contended the ethical and legal framework was “unclear,” adding that there lines between the different WPs were blurred, resulting in many overlapping...
operations, with “Matt’s” WP ending up doing much of the work delegated onto other WPs.

The final sub-theme was Conflicts. “Joachim” commented that there had been vicious rumours spreading that the situation in BBMRI.se was “messy” and that these rumours had an impeding effect on the organisation. “Annie” stated that she had an initial meeting with “Joachim,” “Matt,” and “Jon-Derek” before joining BBMRI.se and they had all thought she was “crazy.” She continued saying “I got angry and protested, they did not understand that we thought [their terms were] ludicrous.” Specifically, “Annie” was informed that her institution’s biobank would not “receive a penny” for joining BBMRI.se, as it was argued that there were already researchers from her institution engaged in other BBMRI.se WPs who claimed some of the BBMRI.se funding. She stated that there had been some initial attempts to save the cooperative spirit but that they had all failed. Instead, she put much blame on the Swedish Research Council, which she claimed still had much influence and was secretly “colluding with [the host university].” The host university had in turn managed to convince the Swedish Research Council that it was “Annie” and her team who were being obstinate. “Sophia” partially seconded this notion by saying that “Joachim’ does not take advice as often as others do.” “Nena” agreed the conflicts had hurt the brand image, saying that she had initially had to coax the academies into cooperating. She put much of the blame on the BBMRI.se management, saying that the organisation “lacked decent leadership.” She added that “June” had tried to usher BBMRI.se through, but that she ultimately lacked the mandate in the Swedish Research Council to succeed.

**Post-Implementation Reflections**

The first sub-theme was Vicious rumours. “Joachim” said that in retrospect, he thought that BBMRI.se itself was partially to blame for the vicious spreading of rumours. He conceded that some of the rumours that referred to the disarray in management may have been true before, but asserted that this was all “history.” Still, he maintained that more work was needed in order to improve the image.

The next sub-theme was Mismanagement. “Joachim” lamented the poor turn-out of a survey sent out to BBMRI.se’s customers and admitted the organisation had not provided good enough service to its customers in order to motivate them. “Georg” blamed the host university for BBMRI.se’s lack of success, saying that it had not invested in shared infrastructures but rather in services geared towards its own biobank. “Annie” was very critical of the BBMRI.se management, stating “I cannot understand how one can look the other way and ignore such mismanagement.” “Sophia” argued that BBMRI.se’s failure was in the hand of poor initial
agreements, leading “to poor initial BBMRI.se credibility among academies.” “Nena” believed a huge part of the problem was that the researchers “were very territorial about their data.”

The following sub-theme was Autocratic agendas. “Georg” said he had difficulty in conveying his opinions and felt “cheated” by the leadership, concluding that this was due to “forces [in the host university]” acting in collusion with “forces within the Swedish Research Council.” “Annie” seconded this notion, saying that the rest of the management felt they had the mandate “to do whatever they want,” while adding that “June” had been biased and had handled the situation with BBMRI.se poorly. “Sophia” said that although she was not personally involved in BBMRI.se, she felt that the leadership was the reason the cooperation between NBR and BBMRI.se did not work out. “Nena” agreed the Swedish Research Council worked “sub-optimally,” and added that although the research groups did not engage in “subversive activities” and did what they were supposed to do, they did, by and large, little beyond that to improve the general atmosphere.

The next sub-theme was Personal conflicts. The main hindrance against cooperation was the interpersonal differences between the BBMRI.se teams (“Matt”). “Annie” called these conflicts a “hornet’s nest” due to their intensity, adding that both she and “Sophia” personally had been “declared persona non grata for 2–3 years” by “Hans.” Beyond that, she said there were multiple other conflicts conveyed in tacit.

The subsequent sub-theme was Organisational confusion. “Joachim” said a huge problem was that customers would not recognise the BBMRI.se brand and confuse it with other actors, most notably the biobank located at the host university. He thought this was “unacceptable” and stated that multiple complaints had been lodged against this. “Maarten” felt there had been difficulties in converting the WPs from the conceptual European structure to the concrete Swedish structure. “Annie” stated that the biobank at her institution was a “double organisation” in the sense that served both the clinics and the academies, but added that it had distanced themselves from BBMRI.se due to its “unclear purposes.” To this end, the existence of two parallel organisations (NBR and BBMRI.se) was unsustainable and led to further confusion (“Sophia”) as it became unclear what BBMRI.se should be doing (“Nena”).

The next sub-theme was Accomplishments. “Georg” thought that the BBMRI.se brand’s strongpoint was the fact that a number of strong and nationally positioned infrastructures had been created. “Matt” lauded the high throughput samples and the fact that his WP6 had been built up by modelling it on the pre-existing biobank at the host university. “Maarten” cited the construction of large-scale catalogue over biobank studies. “June” believed the actual signing of the consortium agreement to be the organisation’s greatest achievement. For “Annie,” the greatest accomplishment was more of a personal nature, as she had assumed the position as deputy-director of BBMRI.se.
The final sub-theme was *Regrets* “Joachim” thought that BBMRI.se should have prioritised a merger with NBR. “Rolph” lamented that technological expertise from the industry was absent and also thought BBMRI.se ought to have involved the county. “June” followed suit and said BBMRI.se should have opened up a dialogue with the industry regarding open-access biobanks. “Matt” regretted that the regional counties were working separately and not collaborating with the academy. “Nena” agreed and said that counties should, by law, be involved in research. “Sophia” felt that NBR should have been participating in the harmonisation initiative.

*Synthesis*

The theme *Brand Strategic Analysis* showed that the respondents were largely motivated by the same aspect, i.e. to strengthen the competitiveness of Swedish biobanking infrastructure by making research more streamlined and accessible. However, there were also self-serving motives for joining, such as prestige and financial incentives, while others claimed to have been more or less coerced into joining. There was also some confusion in regards to the fact that there was already an extant large-scale biobank organisation using own definitions.

The next theme, *Brand Identity*, showed that the BBMRI.se brand was perceived as intended to foster a more inclusive research environment, but that the respondents felt it still excluded many actors, such as the county, industry and NBR. Although BBMRI.se was based on a pre-existing European concept, the idea was to engage the researchers as stakeholders and have them carry over their past experiences and convert them into practices applicable to BBMRI.se. Other important brand associations were the perception of quality assurance and streamlined processes, in a manner and scope that previous initiatives had not done.

The following theme, *Brand Operationalising*, indicated that the concrete measures taken towards building the BBMRI.se brand involved an ambition to engage the internal actors/managers/stakeholders within the organisation. Simultaneously, there were desires to engage external actors as well, most notably the industry and the clinical biobanks. However, the one of the most fundamental steps was recruiting and engaging the “National Champions,” leading scientific experts in their fields. The notion was the BBMRI.se would signify a “leading infrastructure,” with a decentralised, autonomous scientific structure. The flipside of this was that the infrastructure was perceived as “unclear” and, in turn, gave rise to many interpersonal conflicts.

The concluding theme, *Post-Implementation Reflections*, showed that the BBMRI.se brand had been plagued by “vicious rumours” suggesting the process surrounding the signing of the consortium agreement had been a “messy affair.” Moreover, the organisation had made some suboptimal
priorities, ultimately leading to the negotiations with NBR falling apart. The choice of certain investments had also been put into question by other member universities, who also criticised the unwillingness of BBMRI.se’s leadership (based at the host university) to deal with the alleged forms of “mismanagement” they saw plaguing the organisation. BBMRI.se was perceived as autocratic in the sense that different internal stakeholders appeared to pursue their own agenda rather than work in the organisation’s best interest. Particular blame was placed on the host university for allocating too vast resources to itself rather than to shared resources, leading to a sense of betrayal from other member universities and a feeling of helplessness. This was further aggravated by the perception of the Swedish Research Council being biased and acting in collusion with the host university, subversively exercising undue influence. This, in turn, fuelled various personal conflicts, hampering the collaborative spirit. In addition, there was a genuine confusion as to what the BBMRI.se brand name actually represented, both internally and externally. Several customers had confused BBMRI.se with the host university’s biobank, thinking they had received services from the latter when it was actually the former. The fact that there were now two parallel organisations (BBMRI.se and NBR) issuing separate definitions about biobanking did little to alleviate external confusing. However, even the BBMRI.se staff themselves had trouble defining the organisation’s structure and/or what it should be doing. Notwithstanding, most respondents did acknowledge that BBMRI.se has helped create a number of leading infrastructures and registries etc. although many believed that the greatest success of all was the ability to get all medical universities to sign the same consortium agreement in order to establish BBMRI.se. Still, several of the respondents expressed regrets that they had failed to engage/involve various external actors, such as the industry, clinical biobanks etc.

Conclusion

This study sought to investigate how managers of a failed distributed large-scale Research Infrastructures perceived their brand and the role mindsharing plays in light of the organisation’s ultimate failure. As was seen by the results of this study, perceptions of the BBMRI.se brand name were highly divergent in many regards and indicated a large expectation gap amongst the participants. While BBMRI.se aspired to create a common mission statement that was meant to set a precedent for how BBMRI.se should be perceived by its collaborators/employees, it only superficially managed to instil these ideas into the managers.

Specifically, for Brand Strategic Analysis, the pull-factor seems to have affected the respondents in similar ways, as they all subscribed to the same
type of motivation for getting themselves involved. However, this congruent notion seemingly dissipated in the ensuing themes.

In terms of Brand Identity, there were on-set indications of fragmentation of the brand perception. While BBMRI.se was by and large seen as a robust construction that acted in line with its mission statement, it was clear that some respondents sought a more expansive role for BBMRI.se while others were more sceptical of including certain external actors.

Once the transition to Brand Operationalising occurred, the first onsets brand fragmentation, which counteracts the brand synergy, became visible (Aaker & Moorman, 2017). It was clear that most respondents had clearly diverging views on what actions to take, with some favouring grass-root influencers while others favoured a cross-management Scientific Council. There were conflicting views in regard to engaging the industry, and attempts to involve the healthcare were cracked down upon by the directors. There was also a conflict between the ability to offer services, and the ability of securing “efficient operations.” To make matters worse, there was widespread confusion in regards to how the organisation was built and the demarcation line between the different WPs. In addition, the many disagreements tarnished the BBMRI.se name as many of the respondents identified BBMRI.se with conflicts of various types. To this end, the involvement of the “National Champions” meant that the WPs were built up around their competencies. As such, these could act in a fairly autonomous manner and develop their own respective culture and goal perception within BBMRI.se.

By the time the respondents had reached the stage of Post-Implementation Reflections, the brand fragmentation had become a reality, even to the extent that rumours had begun seeping outside of the organisation itself. The organisation’s brand statement was actually obscure even to its customers, who would often mistakenly believe they had received services from the individual member institution, such as the host university, rather than BBMRI.se. Several respondents themselves also expressed confusion in regards to the structure and its operations, which would result in some WPs encroaching on other WP’s tasks. At this point, the respondents were readily accusing one another as well as cursing BBMRI.se’s inherent structure for the result not living up to their expectations. There were even conceptions of the BBMRI.se brand having been hijacked by the host university and the Swedish Research Council and that subversive agendas were being promoted. The respondents were seemingly all too aware of the conflicts that marred the organisation, although some of these conflicts were more ostensible than others. Still, the respondents did not express any disagreement with the implementation of the BBMRI.se mission goals per se. In fact, the respondents largely agreed that the BBMRI.se brand had indeed enabled some viable infrastructures and registries, and that the signing of the consortium agreement was a major feat in.
itself. Ironically, the respondents also tended to share similar regrets in not having involved various other actors in the BBMRI.se collaboration.

From this, the following conclusions can be drawn. The brand fragmentation appears to stem not primarily in a divergent mission perception, but rather the conflation of said mission statement with personal agendas/schemes; or at the very least, the perception that others are doing it. To this end, the BBMRI.se brand failed to establish a “pull-factor,” due to a lack of mindshare brought on by brand fragmentation. As seen in Figure 2, this brand fragmentation does not seemingly begin manifest itself until the transition from the brand identity phase to the Brand Operationalising phase. Up till that point, most respondents appeared to show similar conceptions and problem awareness as to why a Research Infrastructure in biobanking was needed etc. Still, at this stage, the distrust appears to have been imbedded, even towards external actors such as the Swedish Research Council (who were accused of colluding with the host university in order to maintain control) and the NBR (who, while not a competitor, was nevertheless viewed as a complicating factor).

The results show several different practical and theoretical implications for future branding of distributed large-scale Research Infrastructures and similar non-profit initiatives taken in the public sector. The implications from this study indicate that addressing the research direction and communication is essential in order to reduce the level of fragmentation. To the point, a theoretical implication for successfully branding multidisciplinary cooperation in a distributed large-scale Research Infrastructure is for it to account for social and individual motivations rather than by merely focussing on instrumental motivations, such as an official charter or mission statement. The results thus seemingly contradict the notions of a successful mindshare branding, and rather unveils a deceptive aspect of this phenomenon. That is to say, that although mindsharing is present in the initial stages, the effect soon tapers off as the brand building process progresses. This is attributed to the goal divergence and the resulting fragmentation it causes. In turn, this fragmentation can (by extension) effectively impede a distributed Research Infrastructure’s ability to produce a “pull-factor” when establishing its brand name, in spite of the fact that the involved parties may share similar visions and/or ambitions at the outset. This makes it very difficult to ensure mind-sharing proactively, as the indications may well be misleading at later stages. A theoretical implication is that mindshare research is best used to evaluate and explain in retrospect, rather than attempting to predict outcomes in advance. In terms of practical implications, it may be advisable for distributed Research Infrastructures to establish a form of a Project Management Office (PMO), since it has the characteristics of being a dynamic entity that seeks to define and maintain various standards throughout the organisation at different stages (Darling & Whitty, 2016).
In terms of future research, the author suggests further investigation into how other types of branding beyond mindsharing, such as cultural branding, emotional branding, and viral branding etc., are affected by fragmentation (Holt, 2004). The author also suggests further research into the application of “pull-factors” in the branding endeavors of “single-sited” and/or “digital” Research Infrastructures.

**Methodological Considerations**

Two prospective interviewees (“Jon-Derek” and “Hans”) declined/neglected to participate. It should be acknowledged that they may or may not have possessed information and/or views of pertinence. For that reason, information has been sought from alternative sources as well, such as written documents, and/or other interviewees. Further information has been secured through the author participating in meetings and events associated to BBMRI.se, even though no systematic observational notes were recorded. Only a limited number of respondents were needed since this study sought to collect in-depth information. It is possible that a larger number would have obstructed the possibility of establishing the required depth. Hence, there would have been a risk of neglecting an opportunity of gaining an understanding of each respondent (Kvale, 1996).

Interviews always incur an inherent risk of “recall bias.” This is especially the case for retrospective studies (Kopec & Esdaile, 1990). Therefore, great care has been taken to form a proper definition and articulation of the research question. Also, a standardised mode of data collection has been ensured through the use of an interview guide. Moreover, each interviewee was given ample time before answering. This was done in order to allow them to reflect through the sequence of events in the way they remembered them (Hassan, 2006).

As this study employed interviews, there was a risk of “social desirability bias,” i.e. that the respondents could be over-reporting “good behaviour” or under-reporting “bad behaviour.” This has been addressed by ensuring the wording presented was conveyed as neutral as possible. In addition, the real names of the respondents were all withheld within the scope of this study, providing for further neutrality, detachment and reassurance (McBurney & White, 2013).

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