

The relationship between corporate identity-management constructs and relationship-management constructs: a case study of the North-West University

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the relationship between corporate identity-management constructs and the quality of employer-employee relationships at the North-West University. Internal stakeholders such as employees are not so much concerned about how the organisation is visually represented as about the behavioural aspects of the organisation.

Companies are continually finding themselves in positions where they are encouraged to manage their corporate identities with a view to managing their reputations so as ultimately to strengthen and maintain good relationships with their stakeholders. The realisation that employees form part of the external corporate identity of a company has shifted the focus of corporate identity management inwards towards employees as an internal stakeholder group. Although it is assumed that good corporate identity management leads to good relationships, little research has been done on the direct link between the two concepts. Research in this regard has found a relationship between employees' perceptions of how effectively the company upholds its values (as part of the non-visual corporate identity) and the quality of its employee relationships.

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INTRODUCTION

Companies are continually finding themselves in positions where they are encouraged to manage their corporate identities with a view to managing their reputations so as ultimately to strengthen and maintain good relationships with their stakeholders. Initially, this focus was largely on external stakeholders, but the realisation that employees form part of the external corporate identity of a company has shifted the focus of corporate identity management inwards towards employees as an internal stakeholder group.

Although it is assumed that good corporate identity management leads to good relationships, relatively little research has been done on the direct link between the two concepts. Research by Holtzhausen (2008) and Holtzhausen and Fourie (2008a, 2008b) found a relationship between employees' perceptions of how effectively the company upholds its values and the quality of its employee relationships. This article further proposes to investigate this phenomenon by focusing rather on the relationship between corporate identity-management constructs and the quality of employer-employee relationships so as to provide a framework for the management of corporate identity.

Against this background, the following research question is asked: *What is the relationship between North-West University employees' perceptions of the management of the institutions' corporate identity and the quality of the employer-employee relationships?* In order to answer the general research question, the following objectives were formulated:

- To determine the elements of corporate identity and how, according to literature, these corporate identity elements should be managed
- To determine employees' perceptions regarding North-West University's corporate identity management
- To determine what variables, according to relationship-management theory, are considered to influence the employer-employee relationships
- To determine the quality of the current employer-employee relationships at North-West University
- To determine the relationship between employees' perceptions of the management of corporate identity and the quality of employer-employee relationships at North-West University

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main assumption of this article is that a correlation exists between employees' perceptions of corporate identity management and employer-employee relationships. To explore this assumption it is necessary first to offer an overview of corporate identity and relationship management.

1.1 Corporate identity elements

There is a variety of viewpoints as to what exactly corporate identity entails and how it differs from corporate branding. The authors of this article have debated these issues elsewhere (c.f. Holtzhausen, 2008; Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2007, 2008a, 2008b).

For the purposes of this article, corporate identity is defined as *the self-presentation of a company; and is created, among others, from the foundation laid by the vision and mission of the company, the company's strategies, its daily operations, products and services, personnel policies and its marketing efforts* (c.f. Balmer, 1995; Ingenhoff & Fuhrer, 2010; Kiriakidou & Millward, 2000; Marzilliano, 1998; Otubanjo & Melewar, 2007; Otubanjo, Amujo & Cornelius, 2010; Van Riel, 1995; Van Riel & Balmer, 1997).

Based on the above description, three main components need to be borne in mind when managing corporate identity with the aim of relationship management: behaviour, communication and symbolism (c.f. Bick, Abratt & Bergman, 2008; Cornelissen & Elving, 2003; Otubanjo & Melewar, 2007; Otubanjo et al., 2010; Van den Bosch, De Jong & Elving, 2004; Van Riel, 1995; Van Riel & Balmer, 1997). From a corporate identity-management perspective, we consider **symbolism** to be the most important component as this is the component over which the company has the most control. It is the starting point for developing a corporate identity in that symbols reflect the essence and represent the central idea of the company.

Corporate identity comprises both visual and non-visual elements. Visual symbolic corporate identity elements aim to make the company recognisable and to distinguish it from other companies. Typical visual symbolic corporate identity elements include: the company name, the logo, the corporate colours, the corporate signs and billboards, its environment, architecture, facilities and vehicles. Non-visual symbolic corporate identity elements are neither concrete nor tangible, but often manifest themselves in the visible elements of the symbolic corporate identity (c.f. Alessandri, 2001). Non-visual identity elements can include company values, company objectives and company structure.

These elements are conveyed to stakeholders by means both of communication and of behaviour. **Communication** is an integral element of a company's corporate identity and implies the sending of verbal or visual messages aimed at informing (maybe even persuading) various stakeholder groups. In other words, it includes all intentionally implemented messages sent by the company to different stakeholders and to employees (Körver & Van Ruler, 2003; Stuart & Kerr, 1999; Van Riel, 1995). As communication is an intentional action, it is relatively easy to manage.

Corporate identity is furthermore shaped by the company's **behaviour** (Körver & Van Ruler, 2003; Melewar & Storrie, 2001; Van Rekom, 1997; Van Riel, 1995). Companies can be judged by the way they behave (operate). Company behaviour could include the interactions among employees, between employees and management and also between employees and other

external stakeholders. According to Kiriakidou and Millward (2000:330), a focus on employee behaviour suggests that it is by these means that the unique character of the company is projected to external stakeholders, supposedly reflecting how the company “thinks, feels and behaves”. Company behaviour is thus more difficult to manage than communication, and often manifest in the non-visual cues.

1.2 Corporate identity management

From the above it is apparent that corporate identity should be managed as part of a company’s communication strategy. When managing corporate identity, certain key concepts need to be borne in mind.

Corporate identity needs to be **consistent** (Cornelissen & Elving, 2003). This implies that every aspect of the corporate identity is applied as it was intended. Everything the company does should underline the company’s corporate identity: product design, communication, etc. Being consistent allows the company to be unified and it thus becomes a tool for determining whether all activities project a unified image of the company (Van den Bosch et al., 2004).

Visibility refers to exposure in the street, national heritage, media exposure and corporate citizenship (Van den Bosch, De Jong & Elving, 2005, 2006). Visibility in turn determines the relative importance of the company in relation to other companies in the same sector. Whenever the company manages its visibility, it portrays a company that is concerned with projecting a unified image to all its stakeholders and a company that moreover is concerned about being seen by all who are deemed important to the company.

Distinctiveness refers to the unique position of the particular institution in the minds of stakeholders, i.e. stakeholders are able to identify the institution amid its competition. In the context of an endorsed corporate identity, this implies that employees should be able to differentiate between the different business units and the institution as a whole. An institution can achieve distinctiveness through aligning all the activities of the institution with its strategy (Van den Bosch et al., 2005, 2006).

Authenticity begins internally in the institution. It means being real, accurate, genuine and trustworthy. The company evolves through a process in which a very “convincing constructed identity” is created and then communicated externally. The company needs to clarify who and what it is and what it stands for, develop consensus about what it represents, portray it clearly without any uncertainty and from there remain loyal to that identity. It means being real, accurate, genuine and trustworthy (Van den Bosch et al., 2005, 2006).

Transparency means that the institution does what it says it will do. Stakeholders, such as employees, can place their trust in the company knowing that the company is real, with nothing to hide. Transparency thus needs to be incorporated in every aspect of the institution, for example finances, management, services, human resources and the working environment

(Van den Bosch et al., 2005, 2006). A corporate identity can provide transparency through its value system.

2. MANAGING CORPORATE IDENTITY: THE CONTEXT OF THE NWU

The North-West University (NWU) officially came into being on 1 January 2004 as part of the South African government's plan to transform higher education. This saw an historically white university [the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (PU for CHE)], including the Vaal Triangle campus and an historically black university (the University of the North West or UNIBO) merging to create a new university, one at which South Africans from all walks of life can come together (North-West University, 2007).

Managing a corporate identity becomes more problematic when companies grow larger and/or acquire more products and/or service scope. This is especially true in the case of mergers. The corporate identity of the NWU is explained as a hybrid model, i.e. a combination of the monolithic and the flexible endorsed approaches. The monolithic approach entails a single identity with descriptive differentiation in respect of "teaching-learning and research" entities, i.e. the institutional office, campuses, the business school, various other schools, faculties, institutes and centres. According to the flexible endorsed approach, individual entities each have their own unique identity, while leveraging the equity of the parent institution in varying degrees for non-academic (e.g. sports and entertainment) social facilities and institutes (e.g. Alabama music group, the Soccer Institute, the Rugby Institute), and institutional products and services (Report to Council, 2007).

In the management of this corporate identity it must be ensured that all of these business units with their different corporate identities are unified with the entire institution. Stakeholders should thus understand that each of the campuses forms part of the NWU and, as such, is informed by the values and personality traits of the university. The four do-values as endorsed by Institutional Management, namely *integrity, commitment, accountability and respect* have been incorporated in the NWU's brand blueprint and its overall strategy to form the character of the institution (North-West University, 2007).

3. RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

In this article, we argue that three aspects regarding employer-employee relationships need to be monitored: the employee's general perception of the character of his/her relationship with management, the type of relationship and the employee's perception of the quality of the different relationship dimensions.

3.1 General perceptions of the relationship

This refers to an employee's 'gut' feeling – whether she/he is happy with the organisation or whether she/he would rather work for another company. Although not an evaluation

grounded in theory, it is nevertheless a very good indicator of the general feelings or perceptions of employees.

3.2 Relationship type

Two main types of relationships can be identified between an organisation and its stakeholders, namely exchange relationships and communal relationships (Grunig & Hon, 1999; Jo & Shim, 2005; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000).

3.2.1 Exchange relationships

Exchange relationships are defined in terms of mutuality of interests and rewards. In practice this means that one party rewards another in exchange for either a reward received in the past or reward promised for the future (Clark & Mills, 1993; Grunig, 2000; Grunig & Hon, 1999; Hung, 2005; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). This means that one party gives benefits to the other only because the other has provided benefits in the past or is expected to do so in the future (Grunig, 2000; Hung, 2005:396). In an exchange relationship, a party is thus willing to give benefits to the other, because it expects to receive benefits of comparable value from the other. An example would be employees receiving salary in exchange for work done.

3.2.2 Communal relationships

Communal relationships develop over time and once stakeholders get to know one another. In the case of a communal relationship, one party acts because it is concerned about the other, irrespective of whether it is going to receive a reward or not (Brønne, 2007; Clark & Mills, 1993; Grunig & Hon, 1999; Jo & Shim, 2005; Paine, 2003). A measure of the extent to which a stakeholder group perceives that it has a communal relationship with an institution is perhaps the purest indicator of the success of the institution's relationship management (Grunig, 2000).

Even if exchange relationships might not ultimately be adequate, they are nevertheless important to the institution in that they pave the way for the possible development of future communal relationships between the institution and its stakeholders (Grunig & Hon, 1999).

3.3 Relationship quality

Several research studies have identified a variety of dimensions that define the quality of relationships. Some of these dimensions are related to one another (c.f. Grunig & Hon, 1999; Jo & Shim, 2005; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). Those most relevant to this article are trust, control mutuality, commitment and level of relationship satisfaction.

3.3.1 Relationship quality: trust

Trust exists when one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity (Huang, 2001). This is based on actual past experiences and therefore may be

affected by occasional disagreement or conflict between the parties involved. A lack of trust could also lead both to further conflict and to feelings of uncertainty.

Trust has several core dimensions, namely integrity, dependability and competence (these results will appear separately in Tables 9A to 9D) that together describe confidence and a willingness to participate in a relationship (c.f. Brønner, 2007; Grunig, 2000; Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002; Grunig & Hon, 1999; Jo & Shim, 2005; Welch, 2006):

Integrity is the belief that an institution is fair and just in how it treats its stakeholders and whether or not the institution misleads its stakeholders. The company is thus concerned about its stakeholders and it is guided by a kind of principle system.

Dependability relates to consistency between verbal statements and behavioural actions and to being able to rely on to do what it says it will do. This dimension implies that the company takes the employees into account when making decisions because it has the employees' best interests at heart. This ultimately leads employees to trust their employers.

Competence represents the extent to which the company or each of the parties involved in a relationship, has the ability to do what it says it will do. It implies confidence in the company's skills and abilities. It also includes the extent to which a company is seen to be both effective and moreover able to compete and survive in the business sector.

3.3.2 *Relationship quality: control mutuality*

Control mutuality refers to the institution and its stakeholders taking each other into account (Brønner, 2007; Jo & Shim, 2005). The institution believes the opinions of its stakeholders to be legitimate and it thus affords stakeholders an opportunity of participating in decision-making processes, thereby giving stakeholders some level of control over certain situations in the institution.

3.3.3 *Relationship quality: commitment*

Commitment entails that the parties involved feel that the relationship is worth the energy spent on it with a view to forming a long-term relationship. This contributes to loyalty between stakeholders. Commitment is an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship. To achieve commitment, a company's strategy must be stakeholder centred, long term and based on mutual relationship benefits. Trust is a major determinant of relationship commitment and is the cornerstone of the strategic partnership between a company and its stakeholders. A lack of relationship commitment gives rise to 'acquiescence' and a 'propensity to leave' (Adamson, Chan & Handford, 2003; Brønner, 2007; Buck & Watson, 2002; Jo & Shim, 2005).

3.3.4 *Relationship quality: relationship satisfaction*

Level of relationship satisfaction refers to stakeholders being happy with the institution and especially their interactions with the institution. It is an overall assessment of relationship

quality that represents the extent to which one party feels favourably disposed to the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced. Both parties are thus reaping benefits from the relationship and feel that each is important to the other.

3.4 The relationship between corporate identity management and the quality of employer-employee relationships

A number of studies have indicated that effective corporate-identity management contributes to a good reputation and ultimately to good relationships with stakeholders (c.f. Allesandri, 2001; Cornelissen & Elving, 2003; Denize & Young, 2007; Garman, 2006; Grunig, 1993; Grunig & Hon, 1999; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Steyn, De Beer, Steyn & Schreiner, 2004). The bulk of the research that has been done has focused on external stakeholders. Yet, because endorsed corporate identities pose unique management challenges, some studies have focused on the relationship between corporate identity and internal relationships and then more specifically employer-employee relationships in organisations with endorsed corporate identities. The uniqueness of the said studies lies in the isolation of corporate identity elements and relationship-management elements and in trying to establish what corporate identity elements impact on employer-employee relationships.

The unexpected result has been that the non-visual symbolic elements have a greater impact on employer-employee relationships than do the visual elements (c.f. Holtzhausen, 2008; Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008a, 2008b, 2009). Holtzhausen (2008) has, for example, indicated a relationship between employees' perceptions of how effective the company had been in reaching its objectives and the quality of its employee relationships. Company objectives relating to a safe and healthy working environment, socio-economic empowerment, accountability and being a company that unites its workforce and creates a family feeling among the employees had the most impact on employee relationships (c.f. Holtzhausen, 2008; Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008a; 2008b). In the case of the NWU the do-values of integrity and respect had the biggest impact on the quality of relationships (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2009, 2010).

It can thus be concluded that, while visual elements might have a bigger impact when it comes to external stakeholders, the non-visual elements exert the most influence on employer-employee relationships. The objectives concerning the well-being of the employees appear to have had a profound impact on employer-employee relationships. It was especially when employees perceived the company to have effectively achieved its objectives or values that there was a positive effect on employer-employee relationships.

Whereas previous research (Holtzhausen, 2008; Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008a, 2008b) focused on the impact of employees' perceptions of the different elements of corporate identity on their relationships with their employers, the current article focuses on employees' perceptions of the management of these elements and their perceptions of their relationships with their employers. In this article, there is thus not a clear distinction between visual and non-visual elements; the distinction here is rather between the different aspects of the

management of corporate identity. While it is true that visibility focuses rather on the symbolic visual elements and on transparency, and authenticity to a greater extent on non-visual elements, the distinction is nonetheless not mutually exclusive. Based on previous research (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2009, 2010) there is an indication that distinctiveness, transparency and authenticity would have a greater impact on employee-employer relationships.

It is not the intention of the current research to assume that corporate identity is the sole determiner of employee-employer relationships, but rather one of a range of possible factors.

4. RESEARCH METHOD

A quantitative survey was used to determine employees' perceptions regarding both the management of the institution's corporate identity and their own relationships with management. The wisdom of using a quantitative research approach to study a phenomenon as complex as stakeholder relationships can certainly be questioned. It was however warranted necessary in that the primary aim of the study was neither to determine the quality nor the nature of the relationships, but to determine what corporate identity-management constructs impacted most heavily on the quality and nature of employee-employer relationships. It was deemed that this knowledge would help corporate identity managers in the designing of their communication strategy with regard to employees.

4.1 Sample

The entire population (N=4500) of the North-West University was included in the survey. The final response rate was 730 completed questionnaires. Given the response rate of 16.22%, it is not possible to generalise the findings to the entire employee population of the NWU. Instead, these responses have provided an overview of the perceptions of the employees who participated in the study regarding the corporate identity-management and relationship-management constructs.

4.2 Questionnaire design

The questions pertaining to corporate identity management were based on the questionnaire used by Holtzhausen (2008) in a PhD study and verified as valid constructs in further research (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2009, 2010). The questionnaire contained two sections: one part pertaining to the visual corporate identity elements and the other part to the do-values representing the non-visual corporate identity elements. As already mentioned, this article does not draw a distinction between visual and non-visual elements; the distinction is rather between different aspects of the *management* of corporate identity. The questions regarding the employer-employee relationships at the North-West University were based on Grunig and Hon's relationship scale (Grunig & Hon, 1999). The constructs used by Grunig and Hon were developed in a Western context, and had not yet been verified by the authors in the context of a diverse and developing society.

4.3 Data collection

The questionnaires were distributed via email to all employees on each of the three campuses of the university. Questionnaires were translated into Afrikaans, English and Setswana. Completed questionnaires were received via email or submitted by field workers from the different business units.

4.4 Data analysis

With the assistance of the Statistical Consultation Service of the university the quantitative data were analysed using the Statistica software package. The statistical methods that were applied with a view to determining employees' perceptions of company values and employer-employee relationships at the North-West University were Cronbach's coefficient alpha, factor analysis, frequency tables and means.

When factor analysis was performed on the relationship constructs as used by Grunig and Hon, it became evident that these constructs were not internally consistent. This was probably a result of the fact that the questionnaire had been standardised in a Western community, while the employees of the NWU represented a diverse workforce. The application of Grunig and Hon's scale (1999) was an exploration of the theory of measuring relationships in a Third World context in a tertiary institution with different business units and with a flexible endorsed corporate identity. A further complicating factor was that no such study on the relationship between corporate identity-management constructs and relationship-management constructs had ever previously been conducted. It was therefore not surprising that the constructs were not internally consistent.

New relationship constructs were compiled according to the factor analysis. These new constructs were: trust, commitment, control mutuality and competence. It would seem that respondents found it difficult to distinguish between trust and relationship satisfaction, and most of the questions pertaining to the original dimension of relationship satisfaction were regrouped with the questions pertaining to trust. Elements pertaining to a mutual relationship were included in the same category as trust. Tables 8 and 9A-D give an indication of the questions used to determine the particular factor. The Cronbach alpha indicates a high internal consistency (see Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The reliability coefficient should be around 0.7 (70%) for it to indicate internal consistency (Baxter & Babbie, 2004:124). These new constructs have yet to be verified in future research.

Correlation coefficients were applied to determine the existence of possible relationships between employees' perceptions of corporate identity management and relationship management at the NWU. The guidelines for the interpretation of the effect size for a Pearson correlation are: $r=0.1$ (small effect); $r=0.3$ (medium effect) and $r=0.5$ (large effect) (Steyn, 2005).

5. RESEARCH RESULTS

5.1 NWU's corporate identity management

Each of the dimensions relating to the management of corporate identity will be discussed in the following section.

5.1.1 Authenticity

The mean score in respect of authenticity was 2.98 (n=792), this indicating that employees were of the opinion that the corporate identity of the NWU was managed with a sense of authenticity. Especially the perception that the logo contributed to a feeling of expertise regarding the specific business unit stood out with 34% (n=715) of the respondents strongly agreeing with this statement.

Table 1: Employees' perceptions of corporate identity management: authenticity

Statements regarding authenticity	% Strongly disagree	%Disagree	%Agree	%Strongly agree	N=value	Cronbach's alpha
The above picture contributes to North-West University's character.	5.9	11.7	59.9	22.5	711	0.771
The business unit creates an impression of expertise.	2.1	5.9	57.8	34.3	715	
The above picture (of the business unit's logo) contributes to North-West University's character.	5.2	11.1	61.0	22.7	713	
The (business unit's) logo represents the objectives of this specific business unit.	5.6	22.5	57.4	14.5	697	
The (business unit's) logo represents high standards of work.	5.2	19.9	59.0	15.9	698	

It was further also perceived that the NWU logo contributes to the character of the NWU, that the campus logos contribute to the unique character of the specific campuses, that they represent high standards of work and create an impression of expertise. It should however be noted that the *agree* responses are considerably more than the *strongly agree* responses. This implies that although the respondents were generally positive, there is room for improvement in the management of authenticity.

5.1.2 Consistency

The factor analysis of the construct *consistency* indicated that the questions were not answered consistently and the Cronbach alpha was only 0.459. A mean could therefore not be calculated. Employees were of the opinion that the corporate identity was indeed managed consistently and they responded positively to all the statements. The statement they least agreed with was that all the vehicles looked the same (see Table 2). This perception is correct in that only some vehicles display the logo.

Table 2: Employees' perceptions regarding corporate identity management: consistency

Statements regarding consistency	%Strongly disagree	%Disagree	%Agree	%Strongly agree	N=value	Cronbach's alpha
The logo (of the business unit) always looks the same to me.	4.1	19.4	58.7	17.7	700	0.459
The (business unit's) logo is always in the same colour.	3.1	20.0	62.8	14.1	640	
The (business unit's) gardens are always neat and well maintained.	2.4	5.9	51.8	39.9	716	
The business unit's vehicles (for example cars) always look the same.	9.5	32.3	45.1	13.1	674	

Here, the *agree* responses were once again considerably more than the *strongly agree* responses. The statement about which employees felt most positive was that the gardens were always neat and well maintained.

5.1.3 Distinctiveness

From Table 3 it is evident that employees felt that the campuses were easy to distinguish from one another. This was confirmed by the mean score of 2.78 (N=720). Furthermore, when the *agree* and *strongly agree* responses are summed, 75.8% (N=686) of the respondents felt that working conditions differed from business unit to business unit. This leads to the conclusion that there is a stronger sense of unity on the different campuses (business units) than between the different business units. This is confirmed by the 74.8% (N=713) (*agreed* and *strongly agree* responses summed) of employees who indicated that the business units created an impression of being one family. When the *agree* and *strongly agree* responses are summed, 64.1% (N=712) of the employees indicated that they had the impression that the NWU creates the feeling of being a family.

Although more than half of the respondents returned positive responses in respect of the statement, this is nevertheless substantially lower than the percentage of employees who experienced a feeling of being a family within the business unit. Notwithstanding their greater loyalty to the business unit than to the institution, 64.8% (N=704) of the employees indicated that the business units were all pursuing the same goals.

Table 3: Employees’ perceptions of corporate identity management: distinctiveness

Statements regarding distinctiveness	%Strongly disagree	%Disagree	%Agree	%Strongly agree	N=value	Cronbach's alpha
North-West University's business units (campuses) are easily distinguished from other business units (campuses).	2.1	10.5	60.6	26.7	711	0.710
North-West University (the institution) creates an impression of being one family.	7.3	28.7	45.8	18.3	712	
I feel I am a part of North-West University although I work for the business unit.	4.6	14.7	52.0	28.7	719	
Employees of Potchefstroom Campus, Mafikeng Campus, Vaal Triangle Campus and the Institutional Office all pursue the same goals.	7.2	28.0	50.6	14.2	704	
The working experience at this business unit differs from that of the other business units.	2.0	22.2	54.2	21.6	686	
The business unit creates an impression of being one family.	3.6	21.6	51.5	23.3	713	

It could thus be concluded that, although there is, as could be expected, a stronger family feeling within the different business units, there is also an understanding that the different business units form one institution pursuing the same goals.

5.1.4 Visibility

Employees seem to perceive a strong sense of visibility in the management of the corporate identity. The mean for visibility was 2.98 (N=270). However, only 45.1% (N=708) of the employees seemed to feel (agreed) that the campuses could easily be identified by their logos stating their names. This is understandable in that the logos of the different business units are similar and differs only in respect of the application of the corporate colours. It should be noted that notwithstanding the similar logos, the family feeling was stronger towards the business units than towards the institution itself.

Table 4: Employees' perceptions of corporate identity management: visibility

Statements regarding visibility	%Strongly disagree	%Disagree	%Agree	%Strongly agree	N=value	Cronbach's alpha
I can easily find my way around my working environment.	1.5	4.5	61.3	32.7	716	0.703
The business unit can easily be identified by its logo without the institution's name being stated.	10.5	28.2	45.1	15.8	708	
The business unit's logo is visible.	2.5	9.7	68.3	19.4	710	
The business unit's logo is modern.	3.5	9.8	66.1	20.7	707	

Table 4 clearly indicates that employees felt that they could easily find their way in the work environment. This is encouraging as most of respondents had been employed for less than five years. It would therefore seem that the work environment was clearly marked.

5.1.5 Transparency

In order to determine how transparent employees perceived the NWU to be, it was investigated to what extent the employees perceived the management of the NWU to be upholding the do-values.

Table 5: The extent to which employees perceived the values to have been adhered to

Proposed values	Mean	Very ineffective	Ineffective	Effective	Very effective	Total	N=value
Commitment	3.08	2.4	8.8	67.1	21.7	100	668
Accountability	2.97	4.1	13.5	63.8	18.6	100	676
Respect	3.01	3.5	15.0	58.9	22.7	100	693
Integrity	3.05	3.6	12.7	58.6	25.1	100	693

Generally speaking, it would seem as if the majority of employees were of the opinion that the do-values were being addressed. However, the percentage of employees indicating the NWU was **very effective** was considerably lower than the percentage of employees indicating that the NWU was **effective**.

The values of integrity (25.1% n=693) and respect (22.7% n=693) were perceived to be the values that were most (very) effectively being upheld. On the other hand, the value

of accountability had the lowest percentage of responses indicating that they considered the NWU to be *very effective*.

5.2 Employees’ perceptions of their relationship with employers

5.2.1 General relationship satisfaction

The vast majority of the employees (84.2% N=727) indicated that they were happy in their present positions. However, 39.3% (N=272) also indicated that, if given the opportunity, they would rather work for another company. Maybe the seemingly contradictory results can be explained by the fact that employees’ perceptions of the quality of their relationship had deteriorated slightly over time.

Table 6: Relationship with NWU: when first joined vs current relationship

How would you rate your relationship with the institution WHEN YOU JOINED?		How would you rate your CURRENT relationship with the institution?	
Very bad	1.1%	Very bad	1.1%
Quite bad	4.7%	Quite bad	8.0%
Quite good	46.6%	Quite good	47.1%
Very good	47.6%	Very good	43.8%
N-Value	727	N-Value	712

From Table 6 it is clear that most of employees indicated that their relationship with the NWU had been *very good* when they first joined, but that their current relationship with the institution was *quite good*.

Although the relationship was generally perceived to be positive, it is worrying that the percentage of respondents who indicated that their relationship was quite bad had nearly doubled.

5.2.2 Relationship type

In the case of the NWU it would seem, based on the data reflected in Table 7, that the employees were of the opinion that their relationship with management was almost midway between an exchange and a communal relationship. It actually leaned slightly towards a communal relationship.

Table 7: Mean of relationship type

Relationship indicator	Valid N ⁽¹⁾	Mean
Communal relationship	279	2.86
Exchange relationship	278	2.43

To further analyse this trend, the individual statements comprising the means are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Indicators of relationship type

Indicator of relationship type: communal relationship	Totally Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Totally Agree (%)	N-Value	Cronbach's alpha
Whenever this institution makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about me.	7.9	25.5	53.0	13.5	721	0.870
Most people enjoy dealing with this institution.	2.5	17.1	67.0	13.3	712	
Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship this institution has established with people like me.	4.1	17.6	62.8	15.4	726	
Most people like me are happy in their interactions with this institution.	5.8	22.5	62.2	9.5	719	
Both the institution and I benefit from the relationship.	3.2	12.9	61.7	22.2	721	
Indicator of relationship type: exchange relationship	Totally Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Totally Agree (%)	N-Value	Cronbach's alpha
Whenever this institution gives or offers me something, it generally expects something in return.	15.3	40.3	37.4	7.0	719	0.845
This institution takes care of people who are likely to reward this institution.	5.6	22.7	56.4	15.3	713	
Even though people like me have had a long relationship with this institution, it still expects something in return whenever it offers us a favour.	19.9	43.8	29.6	6.6	712	
This institution will reach a compromise with people like me when it knows that it will gain something.	14.9	37.5	40.8	6.8	704	

The feeling that both employees and employer benefit from the relationship was the strongest indicator of the existence of a communal relationship. On the other hand, employees perceived the institution as taking care of employees who rewarded the institution, thereby indicating the existence of a strong exchange relationship.

The significance of the above for relationship management was that the basis for a solid exchange relationship had been laid, and that the communal relationship had now to be strengthened. To determine the true nature of the relationship it was thus necessary that the quality of the relationship be further explored.

5.2.3 Relationship quality

In the case of the indicator of relationship quality, employees were once again required to indicate – on a four-point scale – the extent to which they agreed with the statements as outlined in Tables 9A-9D.

Trust

The mean for trust was 2.71 (N=730), which indicates that this dimension received more negative responses regarding the combined statements pertaining to trust. Table 9A indicates the responses to the specific statements that constitute the dimension of trust.

Table 9A: Relationship indicator: trust

Relationship indicator: trust	Totally Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Totally Agree (%)	N-Value	Cronbach's alpha
I believe this institution takes my opinions into account when making decisions.	8.4	33.7	49.5	8.4	727	0.938
This institution and people like me are attentive to what the other says.	2.8	25.4	62.6	9.3	713	
The management of this institution gives people like me enough say in the decision-making process.	11.0	39.5	41.9	7.6	726	
When I have an opportunity to interact with this institution, I feel that I have some sense of control over the situation.	8.2	34.3	52.8	4.7	723	
I believe that people like me have an influence on the decision makers of this institution.	11.9	41.1	42.9	4.1	723	
This institution believes the opinions of people like me to be legitimate.	5.5	29.0	56.6	9.0	714	
This institution really listens to what I have to say.	8.5	34.4	51.0	6.1	718	
There is a long-lasting bond between this institution and people like me.	5.4	20.3	57.2	17.1	719	
I feel people like me are important to this institution.	4.4	13.6	58.3	23.7	722	
I can see that this institution wants to maintain a relationship with me.	4.3	19.8	62.5	13.4	718	
I am happy with this institution.	3.5	12.9	61.7	22.2	721	
This institution usually helps non-employees.	6.6	40.0	47.3	6.1	670	
This institution is very concerned about my welfare.	7.0	26.6	52.1	14.3	718	

On the positive side, employees held the view that they were important to the institution (82.0% N=722), that the institution wanted to maintain a relationship with them (75.9%

N=718) and that there was a long-lasting bond between them and the institution (74.3% N=719). On the negative side, a substantial proportion of the employees did not feel that they had enough say (50.5% N=726) or that they had any influence on decision making (53.0% N=723).

It is thus concluded that employees perceived that the NWU wanted a relationship with them and in that sense trusted the NWU. The element of trust could however be improved if a more participatory management style were to be followed. As was the case with relationship type, the issue of wanting greater participation in decision making once again emerged.

Competence

The mean for the combined responses in respect of competence was 2.97 (N=730), this indicating that the employees perceived the institution to be able to achieve its goals. Table 9B gives an indication of the specific statements pertaining to competence.

Table 9B: Relationship indicator: competence

Relationship indicator: competence	Totally Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Totally Agree (%)	N-Value	Cronbach's alpha
This institution has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.	2.2	12.0	64.1	21.7	724	0.907
I feel very confident about this institution's skills.	2.2	14.4	58.8	24.6	724	
Sound principles seem to guide this institution's behaviour.	3.3	19.7	55.9	21.1	717	
This institution can be relied on to keep its promises.	6.8	21.0	56.6	15.6	724	
This institution treats me fairly and justly.	3.3	13.2	58.8	24.7	728	
This institution does not mislead people like me.	4.1	19.3	58.8	17.7	724	
This institution is known to be successful at doing what it tries to do.	1.2	5.8	65.1	27.9	725	
I am willing to let this institution make decisions for people like me.	4.1	19.3	58.8	17.7	724	

The majority of the respondents were of the opinion that the institution was known to be successful (93.0% N=725), had the ability to do what it said it would do (85.8% N=724) and treated employees fairly and justly (83.5% N=728). Of particular importance for relationship quality is the 77.0% (N=724) of the employees who were of the opinion that

sound principles guided the institution’s behaviour. On the negative side, 27.8% (N=724) of the employees thought that the institution could not be relied on to keep its promises towards employees.

Commitment

Commitment was the relationship quality indicator with the highest mean score of 3.36 (N=278).

Table 9C: Relationship indicator: commitment

Relationship indicator: commitment	Totally Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Totally Agree (%)	N-Value	Cronbach's alpha
I would rather work with this institution than not.	1.4	6.0	58.5	34.1	718	0.775
I have no desire to have a relationship with this institution.	54.0	35.9	7.5	2.6	721	
I feel a sense of loyalty to this institution.	1.7	7.2	46.6	44.6	725	
I could not care less about this institution.	57.5	31.8	8.2	2.4	711	

In all instances, more than 80% of respondents returned positive responses. The statements “I would rather work with this institutions than not” (92.6% N=718) and “I feel a sense of loyalty to the institution” (89.9% N=721) received the highest numbers of positive responses.

Control mutuality

Control mutuality had the lowest mean score of 2.03 (n=729). The responses regarding the specific statements regarding control mutuality are outlined in Table 9D. There was a feeling (30.20% N=715) that the institution used people to reach their goals. It is also worrisome that 28.8% (N=724) of the employees felt that the NWU bossed them around and that 35.9% (N=274) of the employees held the view that they needed to watch the institution closely to ensure that it did not take advantage of them. This could also contribute to distrust.

Table 9D: Relationship indicator: control mutuality

Relationship indicator: control mutuality	Totally disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)	N-Value	Cronbach's alpha
I think it is important to watch this institution closely so that it does not take advantage of people like me.	21.8	42.3	27.3	8.6	724	0.921
In dealings with me, this institution tends to boss me around.	18.9	52.3	22.0	6.8	724	
In dealing with me, this institution tends to throw its weight around.	17.6	47.7	28.5	6.2	715	
The institution will not cooperate with people like me.	28.7	48.9	18.6	3.8	714	
This institution fails to satisfy the needs of people like me.	26.8	48.1	21.1	4.0	724	
I feel that this institution takes advantage of people who are vulnerable.	32.3	40.0	20.5	7.2	718	
I don't consider this to be a particularly helpful institution.	40.2	41.2	15.4	3.2	716	
I feel that this institution tries to get the upper hand.	30.4	41.0	24.3	4.2	707	
I think this institution succeeds by stepping on others.	39.7	39.7	16.0	4.6	718	
This institution uses people to reach its goals.	19.6	50.2	24.6	5.6	715	
In general, I believe that nothing of value has been accomplished between this institution and people like me.	39.6	45.3	12.7	2.5	718	

It would thus seem that, at least, trust and control mutuality relationships needed to be improved.

5.3 Correlation between corporate identity management and relationship management

In order to determine how employees' perceptions of the management of the corporate identity affected their perceptions of the quality of relationships, correlations were drawn between the different constructs. Because of the importance of the do-values, the individual values were correlated rather than transparency as a whole.

Table 10: Correlations between relationship indicators and authenticity, visibility and distinctiveness

Corporate identity management	Relationship factors					
	Relationship type: communal	Relationship type: exchange	Trust	Commitment	Competence	Control mutuality
Authenticity	0.54	-0.31	0.55	0.39	0.56	-0.45
Visibility	0.43	-0.25	0.42	0.28	0.43	-0.33
Distinctiveness	0.64	-0.37	0.64	0.43	0.62	-0.52

Correlations (r) ≥0.3 are considered to have a medium effect and ≥0.5 are considered to have a considerable effect.

Table 11: Correlations between relationship indicators and the achieving of do-values

Do-values	Relationship factors					
	Relationship type: communal	Relationship type: exchange	Trust	Commitment	Competence	Control mutuality
Commitment	0.51	-0.31	0.53	0.35	0.56	-0.39
Accountability	0.50	-0.33	0.51	0.29	0.52	-0.45
Respect	0.59	-0.35	0.59	0.38	0.62	-0.53
Integrity	0.61	-0.37	0.60	0.61	0.64	-0.52

Correlations (r) ≥0.3 are considered to have a medium effect and ≥0.5 are considered to have a considerable effect.

Regarding relationship type, it is evident from Tables 10 and 11 that when the employees perceived the corporate identity of the NWU to have been managed authentically, visibly and distinctively and to have been transparent through the upholding of the do-values, the more readily they experienced a communal relationship with the institution. The same can be said of the exchange relationship, which indicated that when employees did not perceive the corporate identity of the institution to be managed authentically, visibly, distinctively and transparently, the more readily they experienced an exchange relationship with the NWU.

From Table 10 it is also evident that authenticity, visibility and distinctiveness all impacted on the indicators of the *quality* of the relationship. It would seem that *distinctiveness* had the highest impact on the quality dimensions of *trust* ($r=0.64$) and *competence* ($r=0.62$) effect. Also worth mentioning are the negative correlations between the relationship factor of control mutuality and the corporate identity-management constructs – thus indicating that when employees perceived that the NWU's corporate identity was being managed authentically, visibly and distinctively, the less likely they were to perceive a sense of control mutuality in the quality of their relationship with the institution. Overall, it seems that corporate identity management at the NWU had a positive impact on relationship management.

All the do-values also affected the indicators of the *quality* of the relationship. It would seem that integrity had the highest impact on relationship quality as all the indicators of quality had an appreciable effect. This is interesting in that integrity was also the value that was mostly correctly identified. There was a reasonable indication that the value was upheld by NWU management, although it was not the value that was mostly upheld (Table 5).

It would seem as though commitment was the value that had the least impact on the quality of employer-employee relationships. It was also noteworthy that the negative correlations regarding exchange relationships and the do-values were lower than in the case of the communal relationships and the do-values. It would thus seem that the values had more of a positive impact on relationships.

6. CONCLUSION

The main assumption of this article is that good corporate identity management will contribute to good relationships between employees and employer. To verify this assumption, the research firstly undertook to ascertain the employees' perceptions regarding the management of the NWU's corporate identity. Where previous research focused on the management of visual and non-visual elements, the current article focused on corporate identity-management constructs. The main elements of corporate identity management were identified as: consistency, authenticity, distinctiveness, visibility and transparency. Unfortunately, the internal consistency of the construct *consistency* was not high enough to be included in any further analysis. Though the results did not indicate any really negative perceptions, the employees perceived the corporate identity management to be only average. Visibility and authenticity were the constructs with the highest mean scores of 2.98 (N=720).

Secondly, the employees' perceptions regarding their relationship with management were investigated. However, it was not the aim of the research to determine the state of employer-employee relationship management with a view to developing a relationship-management strategy. Employees' perceptions were determined by scrutinising three aspects of relationships: employees' general perceptions regarding their satisfaction with employer-employee relations, the type of relationship and the quality of that relationship. It was found that employees were generally satisfied with their relationship with the NWU. As for the type of relationship, the results

did not clearly identify a type, but it would seem that the relationship was perceived to be somewhat more of a communal relationship. When the specific indicators of relationship quality were taken into account, it appeared that the employees perceived their relationship with management as being average and, in some instances, even poor. *Commitment* had the highest mean score of 3.36 (N=278), while *control mutuality* had the lowest mean score of 2.03 (N=278).

The main purpose of this article was to determine whether there was a relationship between the employees' perceptions of the management of the different corporate identity constructs and their relationship with the NWU management. Although all of the corporate identity-management constructs impacted positively on the relationship dimensions, it was clear that the constructs that included a greater number of non-visual elements had a greater impact on the relationship dimensions. The lowest correlations (only medium effects) were found for the construct *visibility* (which mainly concerns visual elements). On the other hand, the highest correlations were found for *distinctness* (the degree to which the employees felt a sense of a family feeling) on a communal relationship ($r=0.64$), *trust* ($r=0.64$) and *competence* ($r=0.62$). *Integrity* (as part of the construct transparency) also had high correlations with a communal relationship ($r=0.61$), *commitment* ($r=0.61$) and *competence* ($r=0.64$). The other do-values (constituting the remainder of the construct *transparency*) all had a large effect on at least three relationship dimensions.

In conclusion, it would seem that employees are generally not so much concerned about how an organisation is visually represented, but are more concerned about the behavioural aspect of the organisation. These results may not hold true for external stakeholders, but internal stakeholders seem to regard the management of non-visual identity elements to be more important for effective relationship management. In terms of corporate identity management, it would seem that managing non-visual elements is more important when it comes to internal stakeholders.

The unique contribution of this research is twofold. The first contribution is that it links corporate identity management and relationship management theory. The second contribution is the combined application of these theories within the context of a tertiary institution such as the North-West University. Further research could include qualitative analysis of the perceptions of the non-visual elements.

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