

## Employees' perceptions of symbolic corporate identity elements and employer-employee relationships at Lonmin Platinum

### ABSTRACT

Apart from historical and contextual factors complicating the mining industry, Lonmin Platinum's management of employee relationships was further complicated by its diverse workforce of approximately 20 000 employees consisting of literates, semi-literates and illiterates. In addition, the company comprised five business units, each with their own corporate identity. Within this context it was expected that Lonmin's relationship with its employees would take some strain.

While the relationship between corporate image and stakeholder management has been debated, the impact of symbolic corporate identity elements on specific relationship dimensions has not yet been investigated and is addressed in this article by means of the following research question: *What is the relationship between employees' perceptions of symbolic corporate identity elements and employer-employee relationships at Lonmin Platinum?*

This study indicated a relationship between employees' perceptions of how effectively the company reached its objectives, specifically a safe working environment, a healthy working environment, socio-economic empowerment and accountability, and the quality of its employee relationships.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Large multi-national corporations experience more and more pressure to maintain good relationships with their stakeholders, including employees. Concurrently, the focus of corporate communication management has shifted from pure communication management to relationship management. These theories on relationship management are grounded in the Excellence Theory of public relations with the concept of stakeholder management as a framework (Grunig, 2001:5; Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002; Ledingham, 2003; Barker & Angelopulo, 2006:202).

Lonmin Platinum, a mining company within the South African mining and minerals sector, is no exception in this regard. In fact, owing to both the apartheid legacy and government regulations that are aimed at safety and equity, it is especially difficult to manage employee relationships in the mining industry (Hoadley, Limpitlaw & Weaver, 2002; Lonmin Platinum, 2003:30). Apart from historical and environmental factors, Lonmin Platinum's task is further complicated by its diverse workforce. At the time of the study in 2004 the workforce of approximately 20 000 employees consisted of literate, semi-literate and illiterate employees. In addition, the company comprised five business units, each with its own corporate identity. The units included: LPD (Head office), the BMR Smelter and three mines, Karee Mine, Western Platinum Mine and Eastern Platinum Mine (Naudé, Fourie, Le Roux, Van Heerden, Venter, 2004).

In order to manage relationships effectively, a company needs to understand the nature and quality of its relationships, as well as which factors might influence its relationships. Studies have already indicated that a company's corporate identity can contribute to the stakeholders' images of the company (c.f. Olins, 1991; Van Riel, 1995:33; Van Rekom, 1997:411; Van Riel & Balmer, 1997:342; Allesandri, 2001:177; Downey, 2001:7; Melewar & Wooldridge, 2001:328; Cornelissen & Elving, 2003:116; Van den Bosch, De Jong, & Elving, 2004; Van den Bosch, De Jong, & Elving, 2005; Van den Bosch, De Jong, & Elving, 2006). Over time, the image impacts on the company's reputation and consequently on the stakeholders' relationships with the company. In the case of a company such as Lonmin Platinum, with an endorsed corporate identity, it can be expected that corporate identity will also have a role to play in the nature and quality of relationships, and thus also employee relationships.

Ample evidence was found in earlier studies that communication and behaviour, as elements of corporate identity, influence the relationship between companies and their stakeholders (c.f. Grunig, 1993; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Grunig & Hon, 1999; Allesandri, 2001; Cornelissen & Elving, 2003). However, no examples of research on the link between symbolic corporate identity elements and relationship quality could be traced. Specifically, the relationship between symbolic corporate identity and employer-employee relationships has not been investigated in the South African mining and minerals sector.

Against this background, the following research question is posed: *What is the relationship between employees' perceptions of symbolic corporate identity elements and employer-employee relationships at Lonmin Platinum?*

In order to answer this question, this article will address the following issues:

- Symbolic corporate identity elements as part of the corporate identity mix;
- Types and dimensions of relationships as indicators of the quality of employer-employee relationships; and
- The link between symbolic corporate identity elements and relationship type and quality.

## 2. THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS

### 2.1 Corporate identity

The assumption is made that there exists a link between symbolic corporate identity elements and employer-employee relationships.

For purposes of the current article, corporate identity is defined as *the self-presentation of a company. It exists in the cues that a company offers about itself via behaviour, communication, and symbolism, which are its forms of expression* (cf. Van Riel, 1995:32; Van Riel & Balmer, 1997:342; Kiriakidou & Millward, 2000:51; Melewar & Wooldridge, 2001:328; Cornelissen & Elving, 2003:116).

One of the mediums through which corporate identity is created, is the company's **behaviour**. Just as individuals are judged by their actions, companies can be judged by the way they behave (operate). This behaviour could, amongst others, refer to the interactions amongst employees, between employees and management, as well as between employees and other external stakeholders.

Companies also express themselves through their **communication** processes. These include all intentional messages sent by the company to different stakeholders. The use of communication allows the company to send more complex messages to different stakeholders that might not be so successfully conveyed if they were only transmitted through company behaviour.

The third element, **symbolism**, plays a crucial role in representing the company and is often conveyed to stakeholders through the company's communication activities and behaviour. Symbolism is seen as the binding agent that should mesh with the other elements of corporate identity.

There are many views within the literature as to what elements should be included in the symbolic corporate identity of a company, as well as how these elements should be characterised (c.f. Olins, 1991; Dowling, 1994; Olins & Selame, 1995; Le Blanc & Nguyen, 1996:48; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Alessandri, 2001; Wilson, 2001; Melewar & Navalekar, 2002:99; Bezuidenhout & Van Heerden, 2003:4; Van Heerden & Badenhorst, 2004:18; Van den Bosch, De Jong & Elving, 2005; Melewar et al., 2006:144; Van den Bosch, De Jong &

Elving, 2006). Although, the focus seems to be more on the visual elements, the literature is not unanimous in the classification of visual and non-visual elements. For the purpose of this article the following classification was made:

- Visual symbolic corporate identity elements: These elements are concrete, tangible and visible to stakeholders. These include, amongst others, the name; logo; corporate colours; corporate signs and billboards; environment, architecture and facilities; and vehicles.

In the case of Lonmin Platinum there were nine different logos, implying that each business unit had its own logo, as well as different variations the logo. In addition, each of the different business units had their own corporate colours, such as blue for the company itself, green for Western Platinum, pink for Eastern Platinum, and yellow for Karee Mine. Because a company's logo conveys a number of meanings, often based on the particular strengths of the company, the logo is not mere decoration, but rather defines the company (Haig & Harper, 1997; Melewar & Navalekar, 2002:99). A well-designed logo is both an information vehicle and a persuader; a unique mark for that company and an embodiment of the essence of a company (Le Blanc & Nguyen, 1996: 48; Henderson & Cote, 1998:15). Therefore it is essential in a company, such as Lonmin Platinum, with several logos, that the application of said logos be as consistent as possible, in order to unite the company and project a proper corporate image.

- Non-visual symbolic corporate identity elements: These are neither visible, concrete nor tangible; and are often described as the stakeholders' experience of the company. They include, amongst others the: company values; company objectives and company structure.

*A company's values* represent the company's commitment towards its stakeholders, as well as to the environment in which it operates in all aspects of its business ventures (Melewar & Wooldridge, 2001:327; Körver & Van Ruler, 2003:201). Because of the diverse corporate identity of Lonmin, *unification and family feeling* was identified as the most important company value.

*Objectives* are aims a company aspires to in an attempt to keep the company responsible in all its activities. In the case of Lonmin Platinum the company's objectives included that the company should be profitable, accountable, and that it should contribute to a safe working environment, contribute to a healthy working environment, and promote social economic empowerment.

*The company structure* is seen as both the company structure referring to the communication lines and the reporting responsibilities in the company, as well as the virtual structure of the company which is concerned with how the company appears to its stakeholders (Melewar & Wooldridge, 2001:327; Körver & Van Ruler,

2003:201; Melewar & Akel, 2005:43). Structure is an especially important element in this study, because of the intricate composition of Lonmin Platinum. The company comprises three companies: Western Platinum Limited (WPL), which operates Western Platinum Mine (WPM), Karee Mine, the Smelter, the Base Metal Refinery (BMR) and the Western Platinum Refinery (WPR); Eastern Platinum Limited (EPL), which operates Eastern Platinum Mine (EPM); and Western Metal Sales Limited, which markets the PGMs for WPL and EPL.

Although there are thus a variety of visual and non-visual corporate identity elements, for purposes of this article symbolic corporate identity is seen to consist of the visual elements (name, logo and colours) and the non-visual elements (unification and family feeling, company objectives and company structure). These elements were selected because they were the most applicable to the situation at Lonmin Platinum.

## **2.2 Relationship management: the nature of employer-employee relationships**

Dozier, Grunig and Grunig (1995) argue that the purpose and direction of a company is affected by relationships with key stakeholders in the company's environment. Communication is an important function in the strategic management of the relationships with key stakeholders affecting company mission, goals and objectives. In order to manage these relationships effectively, the type and quality of the relationship has to be determined.

Communication researchers (c.f. Grunig & Hon, 1999; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Jo, Hon & Brunner, 2004) have identified several aspects that describe the type of relationships and the quality (dimensions) of relationships between companies and their stakeholders. These include trust, control mutuality, commitment and level of relationship satisfaction, and thus provide a good framework for assessing relationships.

### **2.2.1 Types of relationships**

Two types of relationships that exist between a company and its stakeholders can be identified, namely exchange and communal relationships (Grunig & Hon, 1999:20).

**Exchange relationships** are defined in terms of mutuality of interests and rewards (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000:13). In an exchange relationship, the parties involved compare the outcomes of the relationship – defined as the ratio of perceived rewards to perceived costs – with an outcome they have experienced in the past (Jo, Hon & Brunner, 2004:17). This means that one party provides benefits to the other only because the other has provided benefits in the past or is expected to do so in the future (Grunig, 2000:1; Hung, 2005:396). In an exchange relationship, a party is thus willing to provide benefits to the other, because it expects in turn to receive benefits of comparable value from the other (Clark & Mills, 1993:684; Grunig & Hon, 1999:20).

**Communal relationships** are where the company spends extra time and effort promoting the welfare of stakeholders. Parties are willing to provide benefits to the other, because they are genuinely concerned about the welfare of the other – even when they believe they might not receive anything in return (Clark & Mills, 1993:685; Grunig & Hon, 1999:21; Paine, 2003:8; Jo, Hon & Brunner, 2004:17). In these relationships, friendships with mutually beneficial objectives are often built with extremely high value being placed on fairness and justice between all parties involved. Communal relationships go hand in hand with commitment amongst all involved in the relationship, projecting a positive image of the company as an entity that recognises its social responsibility function (Goffee & Jones, 2000:143; Grunig, 2000:2; Paine, 2003:8).

### 2.2.2 *Indicators of the quality of relationships*

Quality relationships with employees can increase the likelihood that employees will ultimately be satisfied with the company and their jobs, and therefore be more likely to be productive in supporting the mission of the company. Several research studies have identified an array of dimensions that define the quality of relationships, some of which overlap. Those most applicable to this study include the following (cf. Grunig & Hon, 1999):

**Trust** basically exists when one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity. Huang (2001) explains it as one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open itself to the other party. Because trust is built on actual experiences of the relational exchange over time and may be affected by occasional disagreement or conflict between the parties involved, a lack of trust could also lead to further conflict, as well as feelings of uncertainty.

Trust has several underlying dimensions – namely integrity, dependability and competence – that together describe confidence and a willingness to participate in the relationship (Grunig & Hon, 1999; Grunig, 2000):

- *Integrity* is the belief that a company is fair and just in how it treats its stakeholders and whether or not the company misleads its stakeholders.
- *Dependability* has to do with consistency between verbal statements and behavioural actions.
- *Competence* represents the extent to which the company or the parties involved in a relationship, have the ability to do what they say they will do. Competence furthermore indicates that it includes stakeholders' confidence in the company's skills and abilities.

**Control mutuality** refers to the company and its stakeholders taking each other into account: that the company believes the opinions of its stakeholders to be legitimate; that it affords its stakeholders an opportunity to participate in decision-making processes, and that it gives stakeholders some level of control over situations in the company.

**Commitment** entails that the parties involved feel that the relationship is worth spending energy on. Stakeholders are of the opinion that the company is interested in maintaining a long-term relationship with them; and that it acknowledges the existence of a special bond between the parties involved, thereby inculcating a sense of loyalty in the stakeholders towards the company, which in turn results in stakeholders wanting to work with the company.

**Level of relationship satisfaction** refers to the extent that both parties reap benefits from the relationship. The stakeholders are thus happy in their interactions with the company and feel important to the company.

Companies should strive towards long-term mutually beneficial relationships with their employees. These long-term relationships are usually characterised by levels of trust between the parties involved; dependability; competence; appropriate levels of control mutuality, and commitment to all parties in the relationship. Employees are sensitive about their employers' behaviour, implying that if employees for example, feel they do not understand the company's behaviour, this might lead to a situation where employees mistrust the employer.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

The main aim of this study was to determine whether any of the symbolic corporate identity elements influence the type or quality of the employer-employee relations. In order to do this, employees' perceptions regarding the corporate identity elements, as well as the perceptions of their relationship with their employer, were determined by means of a quantitative questionnaire survey.

#### **3.1 Sample**

A stratified, quota sample of 650 employees, comprising literate, as well as semi-literate and illiterate employees was compiled. The sample was stratified according to demographic strata such as: gender, race, business unit, place of work (underground, surface dusty or surface), and job level. The final response rate was 508 completed questionnaires.

#### **3.2 Questionnaire design**

To provide contextual input, unstructured and semi-structured interviews with management were conducted prior to the finalisation of the questionnaires. After the questionnaires had been finalised, the latter were tested during a pilot study. Alterations had to be made regarding the length of the questionnaire, the formulation of certain questions and the measurement scales in the questionnaire. This was because semi-literate and illiterate respondents were not able to understand some of the more abstract questions, and had difficulty in expressing

their views by means of a 5-point scale. The measurement scales were altered to 4-point scales. Some questions were re-formulated and others were left out of the final questionnaire to address the problems identified during the pilot study.

### **3.3 Data collection**

Data was collected by means of self-administered questionnaires in the case of literate employees and one-on-one interviews in the case of semi-literate and illiterate employees. Interviews were conducted by interpreters fluent in the various languages understood by the employees.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

The statistical methods that were applied in order to determine what the nature of the relationship between employee perceptions of symbolic corporate identity elements and employer-employee relationships at Lonmin Platinum included correlation coefficients, t-tests and analysis of variance. Correlation coefficients were applied to determine the existence of possible relationships or similarities between variables, whereas t-tests and ANOVA's were applied in order to determine any existing differences in variable ratings. The statistical significance level was set at 0.05. In the case of the contingency tables the p and w values were as follows: *small p-value* ( $p \leq 0.05$ ), *medium p-value* ( $p \leq 0.01$ ) and a *large p-value* ( $p \leq 0.001$ ) (*statistically significant*), and  $w = 0.1$  (*small effect*),  $w = 0.3$  (*medium effect*),  $w = 0.5$  (*large effect*). With regard to the correlation coefficient, *correlations* ( $r$ )  $\geq 0.3$  were considered to have a *medium effect* and  $\geq 0.5$  were considered to have a *large effect*.

## **4. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH RESULTS**

The results pertaining to the employees' perceptions of the symbolic corporate identity elements will not be reported here, as they are not directly relevant to answer the research question. (See Fourie & Holtzhausen, 2005; Holtzhausen, Fourie & Naudé, 2006, for a detailed analysis of these perceptions). The employees' perceptions of the type and quality of their employee-employer relationship will briefly be outlined. The main discussion of the results is divided into two sections, namely visual symbolic corporate identity elements and employer-employee relationships and non-visual symbolic corporate identity elements and employer-employee relationships.



#### 4.1 Perceptions of relationship type

The mean scores of employers perceptions of their relationship type are given in Table 1.

<b>Relationship indicator: communal relationship</b>	<b>Valid N <sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>Mean</b>
This company usually helps non-employees	478	2.03
This company is very concerned about my welfare	476	2.20
<b>Total means</b>		<b>2.12</b>
<b>Relationship indicator: exchange relationship</b>	<b>Valid N <sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>Mean</b>
This company only uses people to reach its goals (*)	465	2.54
Whenever this company gives or offers me something, it generally expects something in return (*)	474	2.65
This company takes care of people who are likely to reward the company (*)	480	2.44
<b>Total means</b>		<b>2.54</b>

**Table 1: Mean scores of relationship type**

From Table 1 it is evident that the employees perceived their relationship to lean more towards an exchange than to a communal relationship. Although it is acknowledged that a company should both have communal and exchange relationships, a healthy relationship within the context of two-way symmetrical communication should lean towards being more communal (Clark & Mills, 1993:685; Grunig & Hon, 1999:21; Paine, 2003:8; Jo, Hon & Brunner, 2004:17). Relationship type was thus the first indicator that the employer-employee relationships at Lonmin Platinum might have been problematic at the time of the study.

Against this background, the means scores regarding the indicators of the quality of the relationship were calculated.

<b>Relationship indicator: overall relationship</b>	<b>Valid N <sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>Mean</b>
How would you rate your relationship with the company when you joined?	497	2.61
How would you rate your current relationship with the company?	480	2.54
<b>Total means</b>		<b>2.58</b>
<b>Relationship indicator: trust</b>	<b>Valid N <sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>Mean</b>
This company treats me fairly and justly	489	2.30
Whenever this company makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about me	484	2.18
This company can be relied on to keep its promises	485	2.09
I believe that this company takes my opinions into account when making decisions	490	2.02
This company has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do	483	2.21
<b>Total means</b>		<b>2.16</b>
<b>Relationship indicator: commitment</b>	<b>Valid N <sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>Mean</b>
This company wants to maintain a relationship with me	479	2.33
<b>Total means</b>		<b>2.33</b>
<b>Relationship indicator: control mutuality</b>	<b>Valid N <sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>Mean</b>
In dealing with me, this company has a tendency to boss me around (*)	480	2.47
This company really listens to what I have to say	475	2.15
<b>Total means</b>		<b>2.31</b>
<b>Relationship indicator: commitment</b>	<b>Valid N <sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>Mean</b>
I can see that this company wants to maintain a relationship with me	479	2.33
<b>Total means</b>		<b>2.33</b>
<b>Relationship indicator: relationship satisfaction</b>	<b>Valid N <sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>Mean</b>
I am happy with this company	482	2.50
Both the company and I benefit from the relationship	478	2.37
<b>Total means</b>		<b>2.44</b>

**Table 2: Indicators of relationship quality**

*(1) Not all respondents answered all the questions, therefore the N=values vary. In order to calculate the correct mean score for the responses, the means of the negatively formulated statements had to be re-coded [these statements are indicated with a (\*)].*

From Table 2 it follows that the quality of the employer-employee relationship was relatively poor. In all instances there were more negative than positive responses, but especially the dimension of trust (2.6) had a very low mean score.

Although a variety of factors could play a role in determining the quality of the relationship, the relationship between symbolic corporate identity elements and employer-employee relationships is specifically investigated in the following section.

#### 4.2 Visual symbolic corporate identity elements and employer-employee relationships

In order to determine whether any similarities or relationships exist between visual symbolic corporate identity elements and employer-employee relationships at Lonmin Platinum, correlation coefficients were calculated.

Visual symbolic corporate identity elements	Relationship dimensions							
	Control mutuality: bosses me around	Control mutuality: listens to me	Commitment: maintains a relationship	Relationship overall	Relationship type: communal	Relationship type: exchange	Relationship trust	Relationship satisfaction
LP logo, etc	-0.01	0.13	0.09	0.20	0.10	0.15	0.16	0.07
LP name	-0.05	0.08	0.09	0.15	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.06
LP env., etc	0.02	0.10	0.08	0.18	0.16	0.18	0.05	0.06
BU logo, etc	-0.01	0.26	0.21	0.23	0.18	-0.08	0.11	0.21
BU name	-0.08	0.18	0.17	0.13	0.12	0.09	0.05	0.13
BU env., etc	-0.06	0.23	0.16	0.13	0.17	0.18	0.06	0.10

**Table 3: Correlation coefficient of relationship dimensions and visual symbolic corporate identity elements**

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

Table 3 indicates that the employees' perceptions of the non-visual symbolic corporate identity elements of Lonmin Platinum both as company and as separate business units did not correlate with any of the relationship factors.

During the completion of the questionnaire, the employees had to identify each of the different company logos. The results of this question were used to determine whether employees' ability to identify the different company logos correctly could be linked to different ratings of relationship factors. This was done by means of t-tests, and the results indicated that employees' ability to identify correctly the different company logos could not be linked to any of the relationship factors or relationship types.

Contrary to expectation, it seemed as if the visual corporate identity elements had no impact on employer-employee relationships.

**4.3 Non-visual symbolic corporate identity elements and employer-employee relationships**

As a result of the different natures of the questions pertaining to each of the elements, each of the non-visual symbolic corporate identity elements, as well as the statistical methods applied to these elements, will be discussed separately.

*4.3.1 Unification and family feeling*

Correlation coefficients were calculated in order to determine whether there are any similarities or relationships between the non-visual symbolic corporate identity element, unification and family feeling and employer-employee relationships at Lonmin Platinum.

Non-Visual symbolic corporate identity elements	Relationship dimensions							
	Control mutuality: bosses me around	Control mutuality: listens to me	Commitment: maintains a relationship	Relationship overall	Relationship type: communal	Relationship type: exchange	Relationship trust	Relationship satisfaction
LP unification, etc	-0.05	0.30	0.21	0.30	0.26	0.08	0.16	0.21
BU unification, etc	-0.03	0.32	0.37	0.31	0.23	0.17	0.20	0.21
LP env., etc	0.02	0.10	0.08	0.18	0.16	0.18	0.05	0.06
BU logo, etc	-0.01	0.26	0.21	0.23	0.18	-0.08	0.11	0.21
BU name	-0.08	0.18	0.17	0.13	0.12	0.09	0.05	0.13
BU env., etc	-0.06	0.23	0.16	0.13	0.17	0.18	0.06	0.10

**Table 4: Correlation coefficient of relationship dimensions and non-visual symbolic corporate identity elements**

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

The highest correlation was found between the relationship factor *commitment: maintain a relationship* and *business unit unification and family feeling* ( $r=0.37$ ). Employees were also more inclined to feel that the company *listened to them* ( $r=0.32$ ) and were happier with their *overall relationship* ( $r=0.31$ ) with the company whenever they experienced the business unit creating a unification and family feeling and were implementing these in daily activities and operations within the business unit.

In the case of *Lonmin Platinum*, *unification and family feeling*, there were medium correlations with *control mutuality: listens to me* ( $r=0.3$ ) as well as *relationship overall* ( $r=0.3$ ).

#### 4.3.2 Company objectives

Regarding the objectives of the company employees were given a list of objectives, which they had to identify which were actual objectives of Lonmin Platinum. The list included: profit making, accountability, socio-economic empowerment, safe working environment, long-term research, healthy working environment and political commitment. Long-term research and political commitment were not objectives of Lonmin Platinum. Secondly, they had to indicate (on a 4-point scale) how successful they thought Lonmin Platinum were at achieving these objectives.

A set of T-tests was done to determine whether employees' perceptions of what the company's long-term objectives were, resulted in different ratings of their relationship with the company. The results of the t-tests indicated that only two of the company's long-term objectives, namely *accountability* and a *safe working environment* could be linked to how employees experienced their relationship with the company. These two objectives were linked to the relationship factors *control mutuality: listens to me*, *Commitment: maintain a relationship*, *relationship type: communal* and *relationship trust* (see tables 5 & 6).

Relationship Factors: mean score	"Yes"	Std dev. "yes"	"No"	Std dev. "no"	t-value	df	p	Valid "yes"	Valid "no"	d
Control mutuality: bosses me around	2.41	1.10	2.55	1.13	1.35	467	0.18	184	285	0.13
Control mutuality: listens to me	2.45	1.03	1.98	1.01	4.78	463	0.00	180	285	0.45
Commitment: maintains relationship	2.63	0.99	2.16	1.05	4.83	469	0.00	185	286	0.45
Relationship overall	2.82	0.97	2.43	0.95	4.37	486	0.00	187	301	0.40
Relationship type: communal	2.40	0.85	1.96	0.90	5.36	480	0.00	189	293	0.49
Relationship type: exchange	2.61	0.85	2.49	0.84	1.55	479	0.12	189	292	0.14
Relationship trust	2.37	0.79	2.06	0.76	4.36	485	0.00	190	297	0.40
Relationship satisfaction	2.65	0.86	2.33	0.91	3.87	479	0.00	188	293	0.35

**Table 5: T-tests: Accountability and relationship factors**

Shaded results indicate medium practical significance ( $d=0.5$ ) to large practical significance ( $d\geq 0.8$ )

Respondents who identified accountability as an objective perceived their relationship with the company as being more communal than those who did not identify accountability as a long-term objective ( $d=0.49$ ). They were also, on average, more positive regarding *Control mutuality: listens to me* ( $d=0.45$ ) as well as *Commitment: maintains a relationship* ( $d=0.45$ ) than those who did not identify accountability as a company objective.

Relationship Factors: mean score	"Yes"	Std dev. "yes"	"No"	Std dev. "no"	t-value	df	p	Valid "yes"	Valid "no"	d
Control mutuality: bosses me around	2.50	1.10	2.49	1.17	0.11	467	0.91	329	140	0.01
Control mutuality: listens to me	2.25	1.04	1.96	1.04	2.82	463	0.01	323	142	0.28
Commitment: maintains relationship	2.45	1.03	2.10	1.07	3.33	469	0.00	329	142	0.33
Relationship overall	2.69	0.96	2.35	0.98	3.61	486	0.00	338	150	0.35
Relationship type: communal	2.23	0.90	1.91	0.90	3.58	480	0.00	338	144	0.36
Relationship type: exchange	2.62	0.83	2.36	0.85	3.16	479	0.00	336	145	0.31
Relationship trust	2.30	0.78	1.92	0.76	4.95	485	0.00	339	148	0.49
Relationship satisfaction	2.55	0.91	2.22	0.86	3.63	479	0.00	337	144	0.36

**Table 6: T-tests: Safe working environment and relationship factors**

*Shaded results indicate medium practical significance ( $d=0.5$ ) to large practical significance ( $d\geq 0.8$ )*

Those respondents who identified a safe working environment as being one of the company's long-term objectives seemed to experience more *relationship trust* ( $d=0.49$ ). With regard to the other relationship factors, no significant differences could be found between respondents identifying a safe working environment as an objective and those who did not identify it in respect of their relationship with the company.

In order to determine whether any similarities or relationships existed between company objectives and employer-employee relationships at Lonmin Platinum, correlation coefficients were calculated.

Non-visual symbolic corporate identity elements	Relationship factors							
	Control mutuality: bosses me around	Control mutuality: listens to me	Commitment: maintains a relationship	Relationship overall	Relationship type: communal	Relationship type: exchange	Relationship trust	Relationship satisfaction
Obj: making a profit (*)	0.08	0.05	-0.05	0.05	-0.10	0.04	0.04	-0.04
Obj: accountability (*)	-0.04	0.34	0.27	0.27	0.31	0.13	0.39	0.32
Obj: socio-economic empowerment (*)	-0.03	0.35	0.27	0.31	0.32	0.13	0.33	0.37
Obj: safe working environment (*)	0.09	0.40	0.36	0.36	0.28	0.16	0.38	0.31
Obj: long-term research	0.04	0.21	0.09	0.18	0.2	0.10	0.24	0.22
Obj: healthy working environment (*)	-0.00	0.37	0.24	0.32	0.38	0.15	0.28	0.24
Obj: political commitment	-0.03	0.21	0.11	0.20	0.24	0.12	0.19	0.15

**Table 7: Correlation coefficient of relationship dimensions and non-visual symbolic corporate identity elements**

(\*) indicates actual company objectives

Correlations ( $r$ )  $\geq 0.3$  are considered to have a medium effect and  $\geq 0.5$  are considered to have a large effect.

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate on a 4-point scale how effective they thought Lonmin Platinum was at achieving certain objectives. These perceptions of how successfully these objectives were achieved, when correlated with the different relationship factors, indicated that *making a profit*, *long-term research* and *political commitment* had no correlation with the various relationship factors. *Making a profit* was thus the only actual objective of Lonmin Platinum that did not correlate with a relationship dimension.

From Table 7 it is evident that a *safe working environment* correlated most closely with the relationship dimensions. These correlations were also relatively high in comparison with the other objectives. Employees experiencing the company as achieving its *safe working environment* objective also felt the company *listened to them* ( $r=0.40$ ), perceived their relationship to be more *communal* ( $r=0.36$ ), were *happier with their overall relationship* ( $r=0.36$ ), *trusted* the company more ( $r=0.38$ ) and were more *satisfied* with the relationship

( $r=0.31$ ) than were the employees who did not view this company objective as being achieved.

The objective *socio-economic empowerment* also correlated with 6 relationships dimensions, although these correlations were slightly lower than in the case of a *safe working environment*. Employees who experienced the company to be more successful in achieving its socio-economic empowerment objective, felt the company *listened* to them ( $r=0.35$ ), were *happier with their overall relationship* ( $r=0.31$ ); perceived their relationship to be *communal* ( $r=0.32$ ); *trusted* the company more ( $r=0.33$ ) and they were more *satisfied* with the relationship ( $r=0.37$ ).

Regarding the objective of *accountability*, the highest correlation was found with *relationship trust* ( $r=0.39$ ). Employees who experienced the company as achieving its accountability objective, also felt that the company *listened to them* ( $r=0.34$ ), perceived their relationship to be *more communal* ( $r=0.31$ ) and were more *satisfied* with the relationship ( $r=0.32$ ).

The highest correlation was found between the *healthy working environment* objective and the *communal* relationship type, showing employees as perceiving their relationship with the company to be more markedly communal when the company established a healthier working environment. Employees perceiving the company as achieving its healthy working environment, also felt the company *listened to them* ( $r=0.37$ ) and were *happier with their overall relationship* ( $r=0.32$ ).

From the above analysis it can be concluded that employees' experience of the company as achieving its objectives, (namely accountability, socio-economic empowerment, safe working environment and healthy working environment) definitely stood in relationship to various relationship factors, such as: control mutuality: listens to me, commitment: maintains a relationship, relationship overall, relationship type: communal, relationship trust and relationship satisfaction.

#### 4.3.3 Company structure

T-tests and ANOVA's were calculated in order to determine whether employees' understanding of the overall structure of Western Platinum Ltd and Eastern Platinum Ltd resulted in different experiences of their relationship with the company.

The results of the t-tests indicated no significant differences with regard to employees' knowledge of Western Platinum Ltd or Eastern Platinum Ltd structures and any of the relationship variables. In the case of Eastern Platinum Ltd, respondents who incorrectly identified the structure of Eastern Platinum Ltd were more positive regarding experiencing a communal relationship between themselves and the company ( $d=0.51$ ), as well as experiencing higher levels of relationship trust ( $d=0.48$ ) than those respondents who correctly identified Eastern Platinum's structure. This phenomenon can probably be ascribed to the fact that Eastern Platinum consists only of one company, whereas Western Platinum comprises three companies, which makes the structure of Western Platinum more confusing to employees. Thus, irrespective of the fact that many employees do not know the correct structure of the company, the existence of one mining unit seems to



contribute to a stronger sense of unity among the employees than in the case of Western Platinum, where it was easier for the employees literally to lose sight of each other due to the existence of the different mining units. Thus, the existence of one mining unit might contribute to a stronger sense of perceiving a communal and trusting relationship between the employees and the company than when there are more mining units. However, this phenomenon cannot be explained with certainty; only speculation is possible.

The results from the ANOVA calculations indicated that employees' knowledge of the structure of Lonmin Platinum, and whether they knew that all employees worked for the same company, could not be linked to how the employees experienced their relationship with the company.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

It was assumed in this article that symbolic corporate identity elements would influence employer-employee relationships at Lonmin Platinum. This assumption was made against the background that Lonmin Platinum has an endorsed corporate identity with at least six different logos. In addition it was found that the corporate identity was not applied consistently (see Holtzhausen, Fourie & Naudé, 2006). However, contrary to what was expected, none of the visual symbolic corporate identity elements could be linked to any of the relationship dimensions (see Figure 1).

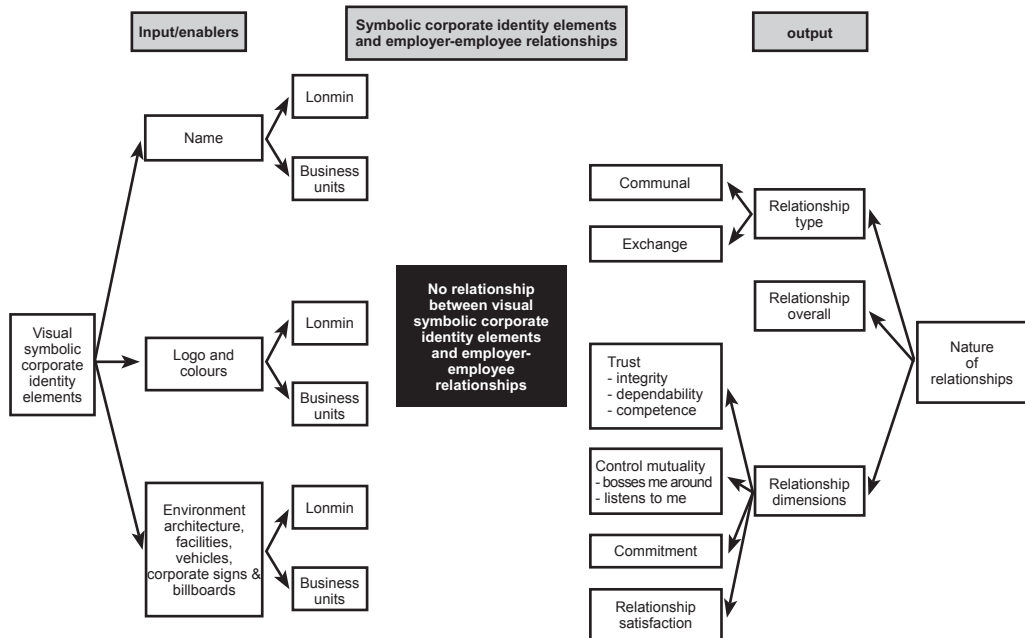


Figure 1: The relationship between visual symbolic corporate identity elements and relationship dimensions



the company listened to them, wanted to maintain a relationship with them, would be happier with their overall relationship, experienced more of a communal relationship between themselves and the company, had more trust in the company, and were, overall, more satisfied with their relationship with the company.

In addition, in both cases (referring to Lonmin Platinum itself, as well as the business units) it was evident that the non-visual element *unification and family feeling* could be linked to some of the relationship variables. It seemed that if the employees felt they were part of the company, even if they worked for a specific business unit, they nevertheless felt a family feeling where they worked, enjoyed a unique unifying work experience and understood what their place was in their business unit, this would contribute to their experiencing that the *company listened to them, wanted to maintain a relationship with them and contributed to a more positive overall relationship with the company*. Thus, when the employees felt their business units and the company itself owned up to unifying the workforce and establishing a family feeling, it had a positive return on investment, relationshipwise.

With regard to the aspect of the company *structure*, there were no significant links found between this variable and the relationship variables, except in the case of Eastern Platinum Ltd, where employees' understanding of Eastern Platinum's structure seemed to have an altered link to the relationship variables, *relationship type: communal* and *relationship trust*. According to the statistical calculations, employees who were not able to correctly identify Eastern Platinum's structure correctly, nevertheless experienced a trusting and communal relationship with the company.

Finally, to answer to the research question as to the nature of the *relationship between employee perceptions of symbolic corporate identity elements and employer-employee relationships at Lonmin Platinum*: Both respondents' perceptions that the company achieves its objectives effectively and also the company's and the specific business units' unification and family feeling were the most pertinent non-visual symbolic corporate identity links to employer-employee relationships in the company.

This research was the first of its kind – especially within the South African mining and minerals sector – contributing to the theories on corporate identity and the importance of such theories in different business environments. It indicated the significance of non-visual symbolic corporate identity elements such as employees perceiving a company effectively achieving its *company objectives* (including accountability, socio-economic empowerment, safe working environment and healthy working environment), and *unification and family feeling* on the relationship existing between a company and its employees.

This emphasised that a symbolic corporate identity goes much further than the logo, or company name, and that it actually encompasses everything that is associated with the company. This study has highlighted the importance of non-visual symbolic corporate identity management in establishing relationships between a company and its employees.

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