Die korporatiewe identiteit van organisasies

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Abstract

Millions are spent each year by organisations in every part of the world on planning, projecting and changing corporate identities. Very little is done however to understand the underlying phenomenon. It is essential therefore first to examine the nature and characteristics of corporate identity before analysing it. Problems in researching corporate identity and possible solutions will also be discussed in this paper.

Korporatiewe identiteit en beeld is nie 'n nuwe begrip nie. 'n Amerikaanse maatskappy AT & T het reeds in 1908 beeldhouprojekte aangepak, hoewel konsep nog ontbreek het. Die eerste gebruik van die term word toegeskryf aan die *Harvard Business Review* in 1955 (Flanagan, 1967 : 63). Sedert 1960 het die belangrikheid van korporatiewe identiteit toegeneem, en is die gebruik van hierdie konsep in die sakewêreld hoog in die mode.

In hierdie artikel word gelet op die essensie van korporatiewe identiteit, naamlik *wat* is dit en *waaruit* bestaan dit? Die probleme waarvoor die korporatiewe identiteitsondersoeker te staan kom, word ook aangeraak.

What is corporate identity?

Although the concept seems to be on everyone's lips, a vast difference in opinion exists as to the nature and characteristics of corporate identity.

The most common meaning attributed to corporate identity is that of the visible aspects of an organisation. Many researchers and practitioners agree with David E. Carter's (1976 : viii) definition *"Corporate identity* – the visual elements that represent a company".

Other meanings include that of "identification of fresh markets" (Finlay, 1978 : 52), or a facelift (like the development of the Calvin Klein range for a well-known but unadventurous company called Saks) (Hyde, 1979 : 50).

Millions (like the $1 million by Addressograph-Multigraph Corporation to establish themselves as AM International in 1979) are spent each year on corporate advertising and planning and yet people differ so

widely in their concept of corporate identity. According to both researchers and practitioners an examination of the nature of corporate identity and image will be a solution to this problem (1978 : 17).

Wally Olins, partner in the UK Wolff Olins design consultancy, exadman and critic of corporate identity programmes considers that

"The results of clever company symbols, nice stationary, prestige ads, etc. are unconvincing and they are unconvincing because not enough thought goes into the nature of corporate identity" (Koski, 1978 : 17).

Browne (1971 : 153), in his doctorate in Business Administration on organisational images, says: "Basic research in the realm of organisational behaviour is needed to provide information upon which to build new theories and practices in the field of business."

So let's have a look at *identity* and *image* and then apply them to organisations.

Identity and image

Identity can be operationally defined as *those unique characteristics that distinguish one organisation from another.*

According to dictionary descriptions an image is a concept or perception formed of the characteristics of a person or object. Image, in our context, does not refer to a memory or a pictorial image, but an image formed from perceived aspects of the subject.

This is probably best illustrated in *British Journal of Photography* (1982).

Mrs. Thatcher projected an image of herself at the last election as a concerned housewife with a shopping basket. That has been dropped and replaced by an effigy of 'iron lady'. Neither image is more than an aspect of the person within.

Lambert, et al. (1978 : 4) describe an image as "in the eye of the beholder", as opposed to the identity which is an integral part of the individual.

People not only form an image, but according to Chaplin (1968 : 231) also make decisions and react to it: "an attitudinal or judgemental reaction towards a business, institution, or nation".

But what is the essence of this phenomenon that influences people so greatly?

Separate experimental research done by Paivio and Kosslyn (both in 1980) indicates that images consist of three aspects or stages, namely a formation of a data structure, association of information and attribution of meaning.

Information (data) is perceived and stored in an unstructured format. No distinguishable associations yet exist between the data perceived at

different times and places. Meaningful associations are only formed once the information is organised in a data structure. Once the information has been structured meaning is ascribed to it.

An important aspect is that the meaning attributed to information can be manipulated and is often agreed upon by common consent.

The three stages of image formation, therefore consist of

- the sensoric perception of information
- the evaluation/analysis of this information (e.g. comparison of one's own knowledge with that of others)
- the assignment of meaning to this information.

Only now attitudes can be formed about the perceived image. Attitudes eventually or immediately lead to action or behaviour (depending on the time of the stimulus).

According to sociologists, *social* image should be distinguised from the *self* image.

Self image is the individual's perception and beliefs about himself and interacts to strengthen his existing identity (Yinger, 1965 : 151), whereas *social* image is perceived by others.

An image is, therefore, the totality of perceptions, knowledge, associations and attitudes a perceiver has of himself or a person or object. This perception, knowledge, etc. are influenced by cultural elements such as roles, norms, values and collectivities (or sub-cultures.).

Communicating identity

An identity can exist only if communication (internal and external) takes place. An image (the perception of the identity) can be formed only by perceiving internal and external organisational communications.

The communicator, however, not only communicates his identity, "but in so doing, he invariably creates" (Mortensen, 1972 : 71). He selects the information to be communicated and, therefore, manipulates the information so that a particular image is formed — the image he wants his receivers to perceive.

The perceiver is not passive. "The process of interpreting events within one's frame of reference is a central dimension of human communications", (Mortensen, 1972 : 126). The perceiver's knowledge, attitudes and experience influence his formation of an image. The credibility of the communicator is an important factor in the perception of the image.

Image can, according to the above examination of the psychological, sociological and communicational views, be operationally defined as *the totality of perceived knowledge, identity, characteristics, ideas, associations, feelings and attitudes of an organisation.*

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Corporate identity and image

How do the elements of identity and image, that we have just identified, manifest themselves in corporate identity and corporate image?

Corporate identity

Gestalt/unity

Although an organisation consists of many individuals, it has only one identity. This can only be possible if clear guidelines exist for the behaviour of the members. Such guidelines may be informal (e.g. the type of clothes worn, cars driven, etc.) or formally stated in law or manifest (for professional practitioners), or in identity manuals.

Identity traits

The unity of an organisation's identity stems from the underlying identity traits. These traits are unique to the organisation, but must stay consistent.

It is this unique but consistent pattern of traits, according to Olins (Koski, 1978 : 17), that should be expressed through every aspect of the identity so that the identity becomes a comprehensible proposition to perceivers.

Dynamic, yet consistant

As we are living in a highly competitive and fast-changing world, it is essential that organisations should constantly measure and review their identities. This exercise is no longer a luxury, but essential to survival.

For example, in a United States government takeover bid of the telephone system in America, the Bell Telephone Company survived only because it had the public support (Flanagan, 1967 : 35). Over many years it had created a bulwork of public goodwill through behaviour of its members and successful corporate advertising campaigns, that was invaluable to it on this and previous occasions.

An organisation must be dynamic to survive. Loot at IBM for example. Who knows if IBM equipment is better than the competition? It's certainly more expensive. And yet its profits are huge (as far as can be established with complex leasing systems). It appears that in IBM's case image helps provits.

Although IBM used designers to help project its identity, and build on it, the identity evolved dynamically over a period of time. It was not clinically imposed upon the organisation.

Corporate identity must, however, be a reflection of the reality — the behaviour of the organisation. In 1976 British Leyland spent £15 million in Britain on changing and advertising its corporate identity (Crosier

1977 - 78 : 1). Yet in 1978 Olins' verdict, published in *Management Today* was that Leyland "haven't got a corporate identity". Why? Probably as a result of three or four different managements moving in three or four different directions and, therefore, no consistency in its products — a reflection of the British crisis of identity, its labour problems and brilliant ideas were poorly executed. Leyland didn't create and communicate an idea that people only clearly perceive.

Psychological, sociological and technological

The identity of an organisation consist of a psychological, sociological and technological component. The *psychological component* is the individual that contributes to the formation and communication of the identity. Individuals may contribute an essential but not very large part to the identity, or may have a major influence. Jan Dirk Timmer was such an individual. He arrived in South Africa in 1977 after the conviction of the managing director and six senior officials of SA Philips of contravening the Regulation of the Monopolistic Conditions Act (Management, 1979 : 10), in the midst of a national recession and with the television market reaching a point of saturation. With his experience in Europe and Africa and by selecting the correct "other individuals" to work with him he put Philips back in business.

The identity of an organisation also consists of a *sociological component.* An organisation is a sub-culture of the economical society. It has a structure and functions, both determined by the type of collectivity they belong to, e.g. the economical collectivity or the academic collectivity, etc. The organisation's structure and functions are also influenced externally by the environment in which it exists, e.g. a multi-racial or multi-lingual society.

The *Technological component* of an organisation consists of its identity signs, letterheads, the subject language it uses, etc.

Corporate image

In the examination of the corporate image it is essential to remember that it is the perception of the totality of the identity that leads to the formation of the image and not only the technological components. Attitudes can, however, not be formed or changed without perception of the other components.

In the eyes of the beholder

The organisational image lies in the eyes of the beholder: the members, owners, financial perceivers, general public, shareholders and clients. Each interest group or individual perceives the organisation from its own framework of experience and attitudes.

Some identity characteristics are visible to all perceivers (e.g. mode of dressing, advertisements, etc.), while others are visible only to the interest group concerned (e.g. training programmes to employees).

Data structure, association of information and attitude

Organisational images are structured data to which meaning has been attributed. People perceive information about an organisation and attribute meaning to it. When they have to take a decision to buy the company's products or shares, they organise this information and adopt an attitude on which they act.

Projection

Because organisations exist they are perceived. All organisations, therefore, have an image. Only the naïve maintain that business organisations communicate only when they intend to do so. In reality, organisations constantly transmit information, by its activities, its silence, or its public statements. Its control of the information is, however, limited to those occasions when it intends to communicate.

It is up to the organisation to manipulate the information communicated and the *way* in which it is done. To that extent they can manipulate the image people have of them. "When organisations find themselves without the benefit of clear-cut corporated images," Baker (1962 : 16) comments in the *Public Relations Journal,"* there is usually trouble in the offing".

Credibility

If an organisation has positive identity traits and these are well projected, the organisation should be perceived as credible. Credible traits, according to Mortensen (1972 : 145) and Burgoon and Ruffner (1978 : 35-41) are character, authority/capability and sociability. Credibility can be an essential building block in the construction and upkeep of an affirmative corporate image. The first of six ground rules for effective corporate advertising set by the firm of Hill & Knolton seem to summarise this: "Be Frank, Fair and Honest" (Baer, 1972 : 21).

Summary

We have considered the nature and characteristics of corporate identity and image. Every organisation has a corporate identity and image, but it is also possible for every organisation to have a *good* image *if* research is carried out regarding its present image and the findings are implemented. "A successful corporate identity programme is only as good as its implementation" (Delano, 1979 : 17).

Korporatiewe identiteitsnavorsingsprobleme

Probleme met die navorsing van korporatiewe identiteit of beelde kan hoofsaaklik in twee kategorieë verdeel word, naamlik 1) dié wat organisasie-gebonde is en 2) dié wat met die navorsing self te make het.

Organisasiegebonde probleme

Behoefte-identifisering

Baie organisasies beskou korporatiewe identiteitsnavorsing nog as 'n luukse — soos vroeër die geval met skakelwerk was. Navorsing is egter die basis waarop korporatiewe identiteitsbeplanning, toepassing en kontrole behoort te berus.

Sonder navorsing weet die organisasie nie wat sy huidige beeld is, of wat sy "ideale" beeld behoort te wees nie.

Samewerking van bestuur

Een van die redes waarom korporatiewe identiteitsnavorsing tog deur besture toegelaat word, is die prestige daaraan verbonde. Dit word as 'n statussimbool gebruik — soos die maatskappymotor, ens.

Navorsingsresultate

Korporatiewe identiteitsnavorsing is slegs die geld en tyd werd indien die bestuur kennis neem van die resultate, dit aan die betrokke personeellede bekendmaak en toepas.

Navorsingsgebonde probleme

Begrippe

'n Groot probleem met die navorsing van korporatiewe identiteit is 'n lukrake of geen definiëring van die kernbegrippe nie. Baie van die definisies hoort eerder tuis onder marknavorsing of advertensieeffektiwiteitsbepaling. Dit is veral wanneer die begrippe geoperasionaliseer moet word dat dit probleme oplewer.

Verslagdoening

Uiters bruikbare navorsing kan dikwels nie gebruik word nie, bloot omdat daar onvolledig verslag gedoen is.

Geldigheid

Soos die geval met die meeste ander navorsing, is dit moeilik om beide goeie interne kontrole en tog ook eksterne geldigheid te hê. Korporatiewe identiteit, soos die mens se persoonlikheid, is egter uniek en dinamies met baie faktore wat dit intern en ekstern beïnvloed. Indien identiteit egter goed gedefinieer en gedragsgeankerd gemeet word, beperk dit hierdie probleme.

Betroubaarheid

Respondente se tyd is duur en beperk. Organisasies stel belang in die inisiële resultate, nie die betroubaarheidmaking van 'n meetinstrument nie. Betroubaarheid kan dus wel statisties bepaal word, maar nie operasioneel geverifieer word nie.

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Vergelykende studies

Vergelykende studies tussen die identiteit van soortgelyke organisasies en dié van organisasies in verskillende sektore kan 'n waardevolle bydrae lewer tot 'n begrip van die aard van korporatiewe identiteit. Dié gegewens is egter moeilik of onmoontlik om in die hande te kry weens die noodsaaklikheid van geheimhouding van die resultate.

Stereotipes

Marktendense of stereotipes, bv. dat 'n ouditeur konserwatief moet wees of dat 'n advertensie-organisasie noodwendig dinamies is, beïnvloed navorsingsresultate.

Meetinstrument

Dit is moeilik om die korporatiewe identiteitstrekke van 'n organisasie vas te stel — soos reeds bespreek onder organisasiegebonde navorsingsprobleme. Dit bemoeilik die navorser se taak om die korporatiewe beeld te meet, aangesien die waarneming van die trekke gemeet word. Korporatiewe beeld bestaan ook, soos reeds gesien, uit 'n ondersoek na die aard daarvan, uit informasie-waarneming, betekenistoekenning en houdings. Meetinstrumente meet gewoonlik net houdings of waarneming van inligting.

Op die oog af blyk die Semantiese Differensiaalskaal van Osgood, Suci en Tannenbaum (1957) 'n bruikbare meetinstrument te wees. Die konsep "beeld" is dan ook reeds met behulp van hierdie skaal gemeet. Die betroubaarheid en geldigheid van die skaal is al herhaaldelik geverifieer.

Mindak (Snider en Osgood, 1969 : 618-623) het 'n modifikasie van die skaal gebruik om die beeld van 'n organisasie se produkte te meet. Die resultate en instrument is egter markgerig en meet nie die totale beeld van die organisasie nie.

Die Semantiese Differensiaalskaal is 'n houdingskaal en sluit nie die meting van informasie-oordrag in nie. Dit is ook 'n ordinale skaal, sodat die interval tussen tellings en die absolute nulpunt nie bepaal kan word nie.

'n Modifikasie van die SD-skaal deur Spector (1961) toon moontlikhede. Hy het gewigte toegeken aan die trekke van die organisasie wat hy gebruik het om die beeld mee te meet. Dit was dus moontlik om die absolute waarde van die dimensies te bepaal. Onvolledige verslaggewing van sy kontruksiemetodologie het sy meetinstrument egter onbruikbaar gemaak.

Dit is verkieslik dat 'n bruikbare meetinstrument nie tydrowend moet wees nie en dat die skaalwaardes geheg moet word aan gedragsinsidente van die betrokke identiteitstrek. Dit maak goeie responsie en akkurate meting moontlik.

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Die gedragsgeankerde beoordelingskaal wat in 1963 deur Smith en Kendall ontwikkel is, word dikwels deur bedryfsielkundiges gebruik. Die eienskappe van die meetinstrument is onder meer dat dit gedragsgeankerd en in die taalidioom van die respondent is en dat gewig aan die dimensies toegeken kan word. Dit is dus bruikbaar vir korporatiewe identiteitsnavorsing. Dit meet kennis sowel as houding. Die konstruksie van die instrument verseker voorts geldigheid en betroubaarheid. Dié skaal is nog nooit voorheen in die spesifieke veld gebruik nie en soortgelyke studies se resultate behoort interessant te wees.

Slot

Daar word daagliks meer navorsing en praktiese werk gedoen wat korporatiewe identiteit en beeld betref. Indien navorsers die basiese navorsingsprobleme kan oorbrug en die organisasie van hulle kant samewerking gee en resultate toepas, behoort daar vrugbare resultate na vore te kom.

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