Chapter 13

Managing corporate reputation: identity and branding

The awareness, perception and attitudes held by an organisation's various stakeholders will vary in intensity and need to be understood and acted upon. This can be accomplished through a strategy that develops the profile of an organisation, one that seeks continual dialogue and leads to the development of trust-based relationships. This is necessary in order that stakeholders think and act favourably towards an organisation and enable the organisation to develop strategies that are compatible with the environment and its own objectives.

Aims and learning objectives

The aim of this chapter is to consider those communications that are designed to encourage a dialogue with stakeholders, with a view to influencing the image and reputation of the organisation.

The learning objectives of this chapter are to:

1. examine the key concepts associated with corporate identity;
2. understand the difference between corporate branding and corporate identity;
3. consider some of the ideas and issues associated with corporate communications;
4. understand the core elements associated with corporate identity;
5. explain the meaning and importance of corporate reputation;
6. introduce a framework incorporating corporate identity into the process of strategic management.

For an applied interpretation see Karl Milner and Graham Hughes' MiniCase entitled ***Just how branded is the NHS?*** at the end of this chapter.

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the way in which organisations are presented and perceived, and how they interact with their various stakeholder audiences. It is also concerned with the images that people form as a result of interpreting the various identity signals that organisations transmit and any interaction that may ensue. Melewar (2003) derived the following definition from a consideration of the literature. For him, corporate identity is concerned with 'the set of meanings by which an organisation allows itself to be known and through which it enables people to describe, remember and relate to it'.

People form images of an organisation based on the cues or signals that organisations transmit.

All organisations use corporate communications to deliver their corporate identity. It is through the identity that stakeholders form images of the organisation and, through time, corporate reputations are built. People form images of an organisation based on the cues or signals that organisations transmit. These cues may be sent deliberately or they may be accidental or unintended. Whatever the source, these cues can be critical because the way they are interpreted shapes the way organisations are regarded and even whether transactions occur.

Hatch and Schultz (2000) refer to two schools of thought about strategic identity management. The 'visual' school, which is concerned with operational aspects, and a 'strategic' school, which is concerned with an organisation's aims and how it positions and distinguishes itself. This demarcation is useful because not only does it help identify the scope of the topic but it also shows how identity management, indeed reputation management, has evolved. These two aspects of identity management are referred to later in this chapter.

Organisations are said to have a personality, a persona that reflects the inner spirit and heart of the organisation. From this cultural core identities are developed and presented to the outside world. The management of the corporate identity is vital if the image held of the organisation, by all stakeholders, is to be consistent and accurately represent the personality of the organisation (Dowling, 1993).

Gorb (1992) refers to a continuum of differentiation where at one end there is a total loss of personality and at the other end a schizoid position is achieved. The trick is to change with the environment and maintain a differentiated position by providing continuity in the way the identity is represented and perceived. He quotes Shell, whose logo, established over a century ago, appears to have been preserved unchanged. Exhibit 13.1 shows that in reality it has undergone many changes and what we see today is nothing like the original. This has occurred through careful continuity of the idea of the seashell and adaptation of it to the various contexts through time.

There are a number of identity-related topics, including visual identity, strategic corporate identity, social identity and organisational identity (He and Balmer, 2007). These are set out at Table 13.1.

Table 13.1 Perspectives on identity schools of thought

Form of identity		Explanation
Corporate identity	Visual	Using visual expression for organisational self-presentation.
	Strategic	Using an organisation's characteristics, traits and attributes as cues to express how an organisation wants to be seen.
Social identity		How members see themselves as a social part of the organisation.
Organisational identity		The identity of an organisation as perceived by the members.

Exhibit 13.1 Shell have evolved their logo over a long time to the point that the current logo shows little similarity to the original
Shell Brands International AG.

Although He and Balmer separate the visual and strategic forms of corporate identity they are often considered to be part of the same area of study. The social and organisational forms of identity are part of the organisational behaviour school of thought. However, there is evidence to suggest that the organisational and corporate identity schools are showing signs of overlap, a view shared by Cornelissen *et al.* (2007) and Anisimova (2007). Although reference is made to organisational identity, this chapter concentrates on corporate identity that encapsulates both the visual and strategic perspectives.

Corporate identity or corporate branding?

Some researchers, authors and marketing practitioners prefer the term ‘corporate branding’ and are using it to replace the expression ‘corporate identity’. Balmer (1998) suggested that corporate identity was the accepted terminology in the 1980s and early 1990s, and that this gave way to corporate branding at the turn of the century. However, it can be argued that there are some intrinsic differences in this terminology. Balmer and Gray (2003) claim that there are strong and fundamental differences between these two concepts. All organisations have a need to address identity-related issues, such as those posed by Albert and Whetten (1985) who said the three key questions that organisations need to find answers to are, ‘Who are we?’, ‘What business are we in?’, and ‘What do we want to be?’ However, if corporate identity is a necessity for all organisations, corporate branding is not. Corporate brands are developed from their identity and, unlike traditional

> Corporate brands are developed from their identity and primarily concerned with the delivery of specific corporate promises.

approaches to corporate messages, are primarily concerned with the delivery of specific corporate promises. These promises are often conveyed through a short strapline or 'mantra' (Keller, 1999). Balmer and Gray (2003) use Disney and Nike as examples: 'fun, family entertainment' and 'authentic athletic performance' respectively. These brands are seen to consist of certain criteria, which are set out in Table 13.2.

Table 13.2 Corporate brand criteria

Corporate brand criteria	Explanation
Rarity	Corporate brand values (functional and emotional) developed over time that cannot be easily imitated.
Durability	The value of the brand depreciates slowly, relative to product brands.
Inappropriability	Only the owning organisation can derive performance-related outcomes.
Imperfect imitability	It is very difficult for a competitor to copy or replicate the brand.
Imperfect substitutability	Strong corporate brands maintain their position through continuous improvement and protect themselves from competitors and from being overtaken.

Source: Based on Balmer and Gray (2003).

ViewPoint 13.1 ITN Source of rebranding

ITN Source offers moving-image content for its customers in a wide range of television, film, advertising, education online and many other creative media sectors. The company claims to provide access to the largest collection of moving-image libraries in the world, housing over 800,000 hours of footage captured over three centuries. It adds 15 hours of content each day and is growing its revenue at 35 per cent per annum.

To signify its position as a major global multimedia-content business it changed its name from ITN Archive to ITN Source and rebranded each of its six divisions with individual identities while unifying them under a fresh, new global identity.

A bulk email was personalised and sent to 14,000 customers. It included a call-to-action encouraging respondents to click through to a microsite. The launch was preceded with a major technical update to the web site. This allows for enhanced interactive capabilities and the ability to demonstrate footage work. It is claimed that the system enhanced the communication of the rebranding exercise and drove higher than expected traffic levels back to the site. The campaign emails alone achieved a click through rate of 7 per cent.

Sources: Williams, (2006); www.itnsource.com/en/About_Us/PressOffice/.

Question

To what extent is this rebranding exercise a visual or strategic task and what business is ITN Source in?

Task

Visit www.itnsource.com and find out what the company's strapline is.

Table 13.3 Differences between product and corporate brands

	Product brand	Organisation brand
Focus of attention on . . .	The product	The organisation
Managed by . . .	Middle management	CEO/top management
Attract attention and gain support of . . .	Customers	Multiple stakeholders
Delivered by . . .	Marketing	Whole organisation
Communicated by . . .	Marketing communications	Multiple communications, activities, and contacts
Time horizon . . .	Short (product life)	Long (organisation life)
Importance to organisation . . .	Tactical for function	Strategic for organisation

Source: Adapted from Balmer (2001). Used with permission.

Balmer and Gray developed these criteria based on the 'resource-based view of the firm', which is grounded in the brand, having considerable resources and capabilities that can be used as a major source of sustainable value. The basis therefore, of a strong corporate brand and its ability to deliver its promise is the organisation's ability to continually leverage its resources to deliver superior value.

> A strong corporate brand and its ability to deliver its promise is the organisation's ability to continually leverage its resources to deliver superior value.

Corporate brands are a complex form of identity, but not all organisations need a corporate brand, if, for example, they are a public utility, monopoly or work in commodities. Even though this area is of increasing interest to academics and organisations, issues concerning the development and criticality of corporate reputation appear to be of greater importance to organisations.

Before proceeding it is worth establishing the differences between product and corporate branding. Although some argue that the two are intrinsically the same and it is only the implementation and context that differs, there is a generally held view that corporate and product brands are different. Anisimova (2007) suggests that corporate branding represents a blend of the perspectives held by those corporate identity and the organisational theorists. Dunnion and Knox (2005) offer the following table (Table 13.3) that sets out clearly the key points of difference.

The corporate identity process

Shee and Abratt (1989) are acknowledged to be the first to attempt to disentangle the confusion surrounding identity and image. They identify three main elements that are central to the development of corporate image (see Figure 13.1). These are corporate personality, identity and image. Individuals and organisations project their

> Three main elements are central to the development of corporate image: corporate personality, identity and image.

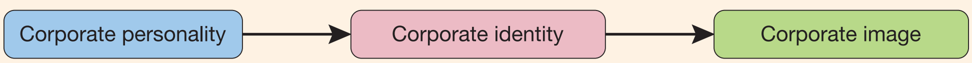

Figure 13.1 Elements of corporate identity
Source: Representing ideas contained in Shee and Abratt (1989). Used with kind permission.

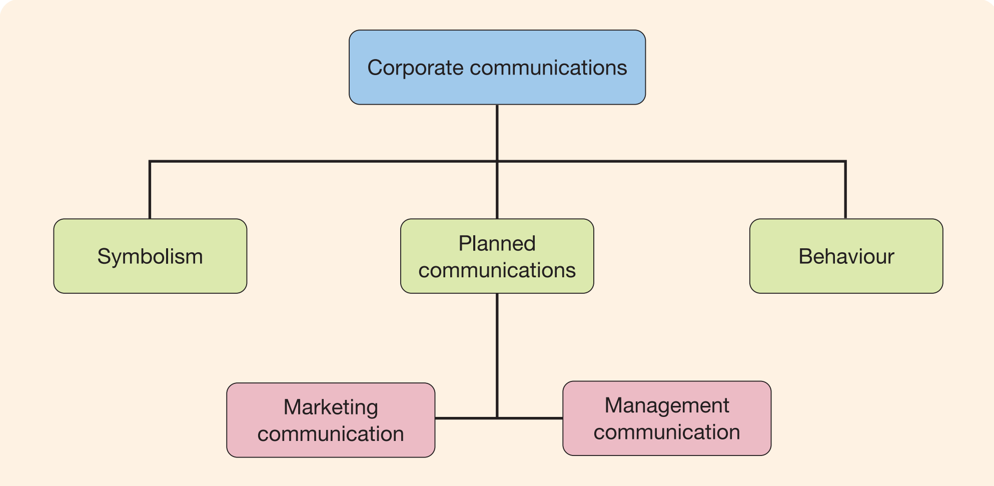

Figure 13.2 Dimensions of corporate communications

personalities through their identity. The identity is communicated through corporate communications that include symbolism, behaviour and marketing communications. The audience's perception of the identity is the image they have of the object, in this case, the corporate body. This process is discussed in the next sections and is represented in Figure 13.2.

Corporate personality

The first of these elements requires the recognition and acceptance that organisations have personalities, or at least significant characteristics. As Bernstein (1984) states, just as individuals have personalities, so do organisations. Corporate personalities are derived partly from the cultural characteristics of the organisation: the core values and beliefs that in turn are part of a corporate philosophy. Essential to corporate personality is the strategy process adopted by the organisation. The degree to which the strategic process is either formalised and planned or informal and emergent, and whether strategy is well communicated, play major roles in shaping the personality of the organisation.

For example, management now recognises the powerful influence that an organisation's corporate objectives have in informing and guiding the operations of each of the functional departments. The formulation of the mission statement requires management and employees to understand what the organisation seeks to achieve. To understand what the organisation wants to achieve requires understanding what the organisation values and believes in, which in turn involves and reflects the involvement of all members of the organisation, either deliberately or involuntarily. Indeed, the stated philosophy and values that are articulated through the mission statement (and other devices) are important in establishing the preferred relationship it has with its various constituencies (Leuthesser and Kohli, 1997).

> Corporate personality can be considered to be composed of two main facets: the culture and overall strategic purpose.

The corporate personality can be considered to be composed of two main facets: the culture and overall strategic purpose (Markwick and Fill, 1997). Organisational culture is a composite of the various sectional interests and drives held by various key members. The blend of product offering, facilities, values and beliefs, staff, structure, skills and systems leads to the formation of particular characteristics or traits. Traits are rarely uniform in their dispersal throughout an organisation, so the way in which these interests are bound together impacts upon the form of the primary culture.

The strategic processes adopted by organisations are relatively constant because the roots of a process are embedded within the spectrum of organisational activities. Changing the strategic process is very different from changing the content of a strategy. Stuart (1999a) refers specifically to the contribution the organisational structure can make to an organisation's corporate identity. Interestingly she considers Mintzberg's typology of organisational structures Mintzberg and Quinn, (1988), but what can be gathered is that structure impacts on strategy, which informs the identity process.

There was a great deal of merger activity in the late 1990s but management appears to be guilty of not paying enough attention to a vision of what the new culture will be like and how it will be expressed through the identity. The merger between Mannesmann, which was over 100 years old, and Vodafone, a mere 18 years old, was made on the basis of share value and global expansion, not cultural fit. The evidence suggests that it is the financial business model that dominates and not the brand model. Mergers do not result in amalgamated cultures, as experience shows that one will be pre-eminent, usually as a result of one or two key individuals reaching top positions. People also leave because they do not like the new way of doing things.

Corporate personality is the totality of the characteristics that identify an organisation. Consider the values held by organisations such as easyJet, HSBC, the NHS, Tesco and Oxfam. Not only are the images different but so are the values and the personalities.

The BBC and Channel 5 are interesting organisations to consider from a personality perspective. The BBC is a mature organisation where stability, security and reliability have long been regarded as important characteristics. However, these are now regarded by some as impediments to progress and innovation, not helped by the events surrounding the Hutton inquiry. Channel 5 is young and vibrant, where programme quality is measured differently from the BBC and where innovation is seen as an important part of challenging the rules of standard broadcasting.

Corporate personality is what an organisation actually is.

Corporate identity

The second element in the image process is corporate identity. This is the formation of the cues by which stakeholders can recognise and identify the organisation. In recent years, many organisations have chosen to pay more attention to their identity and have tried to manage these cues more deliberately.

ViewPoint 13.2 Rocky identities

Many financial services organisations offer online banking. The chance to reduce costs and reach new customer groups has been a major force behind this development. What is interesting, however, is that many have chosen to rebrand their online offering and create a separate identity.

The Halifax uses 'If', the Cooperative Bank 'Smile' and Citi 'Egg'. Abbey National chose to use the name 'Cahoot' in order to reach a more affluent customer, one which research shows would not normally bank with Abbey National.

The disguise of the online brand identity therefore enables organisations to use communications to be directed to particular customer segments without having to overcome the negative values associated with the parent brand.

The chaos that surrounded the wrecked Northern Rock bank resulted in a change of strategy. This involved downsizing the operation and converting from a lender (of mortgages) to become, principally, a savings bank (Odoi, 2008). One of the key questions, therefore, is should the name of the bank be changed?

Question

Would you change the name of the Northern Rock bank?

Task

Make a list of the possible names you would consider using if a new name had been required. Would the new name contain the words Northern and Rock in it?

Identity is a means by which an organisation differentiates itself from other organisations.

Identity is a means by which an organisation differentiates itself from other organisations. Bernstein (1984) makes an important point when he observes that all organisations have an identity, whether they like it or not. Some organisations choose deliberately to manage their identities, just as individuals choose not to frequent particular shops or restaurants, drive certain cars or wear specific fabrics or colours. Other organisations take less care over their identities and the way in which they transmit their identity cues, and as a result confuse and mislead members of their networks and underperform in the markets in which they operate.

According to Olins (1989), management of the identity process can communicate three key ideas to its audiences. These are what the organisation is, what it does and how it does it. Corporate identity is manifested in four ways. These, he says, can be interpreted as the products and services that the organisation offers, where the offering is made or distributed, how the organisation communicates with stakeholders and, finally, how the organisation behaves.

The marked development of the corporate brand has been noticeable in recent years. Organisations have used it as a means of differentiating their products from competitors' products and have recognised the power of the characteristics that delineate one organisation from another. These characteristics are embodied by the organisation's personality, values and culture. The corporate brand is a means of presenting these characteristics to various audiences, such as financial markets, suppliers, employees, channel network partners, trade unions, competitors and customers.

Corporate communications

Corporate communication refers to the process that translates corporate identity into corporate image.

According to Ind (1992) corporate communication refers to the process that translates corporate identity into corporate image. As mentioned above, increasingly organisations are taking an active interest in corporate identity and branding (Cowlett, 2000) mainly because of the benefits that can be achieved across the organisation. By attempting to control the messages that it transmits, an organisation can inform and motivate stakeholders concerning what it is, what it does and how it does it in a credible and consistent way. Traditionally, the bulk of this communication work has been the responsibility of public relations.

Corporate communications consists of three main elements: symbolism, behaviour and different forms of planned communication. These planned communications consist of management communication and marketing communication. The former is concerned with line and functional communications necessary to ensure functional activities are completed appropriately. This also includes management communications undertaken with external stakeholders. Marketing communications involve product- and service-oriented communications and organisational communication, normally undertaken through a range of public relations activities and corporate advertising, plus internal communications aimed at building commitment and identification with the organisation (see Figure 13.2). Consideration is given here to symbolism and behaviour. Public relations is considered in Chapter 19 and internal marketing communications is explored in Chapter 30.

Symbolism

Symbolism refers to the visual aspect of identity and was once regarded as the sole aspect of corporate identity management. Salame and Salame (1975) were some of the first researchers to consider visual identity in this way. Indeed, there are many today who regard visual identity as the only real element of corporate identity, mentioned earlier as the visual school of corporate identity. Schein (1985), in his hierarchy of corporate culture, determines 'visible artefacts' as the first level. These are the more immediately observable aspects of the culture, such as the letterheads, logos, signage, emblems, colour schemes, architecture and the overall appearance of all the design aspects associated with the company. Dowling (1994) refers to visual identity and its composition consisting of four key elements: corporate names, logos and symbols, typefaces and colour. It is thought that through the use of symbolism a level of harmonisation can be achieved by bringing all of these identity cues together. To these elements should be added architecture and physical location (Melewar *et al.* (2006)).

Visual identity consists of four keying in point for elements: corporate names, logos and symbols, typefaces and colour.

Visual identity is also an important element in an organisation's international strategy and the way in which it wishes to be perceived in different countries and regions. In particular, multinational organisations need to find new ways of identifying themselves as a result of merger, acquisition, technological developments, restructuring and other changes in their various marketplaces (Melewar, 2001).

Van den Bosch *et al.* (2004) found in their research that a large number of organisations use templates and corporate identity manuals to help manage their visual identities and that to a large extent these were accepted by both employees and managers as appropriate tools to manage what was agreed to be an important subject. However, there is little evidence to show whether this energy is well directed and importantly it appears that many managers are not consistent in their approach to managing visual identity and that they do not always 'do as they say'.

Corporate branding and names

Associated with the symbolism used by organisations is the name and how this is presented. The constituent parts of a corporate brand are many and varied. One interpretation suggests that a brand consists of the following variables: reputation, product and service performance, product brand and customer portfolio and networks in the sense of positioning (Knox and Maklan, 1998). Another interpretation is that each brand is perceived with varying degrees of intensity depending on the level of involvement customers have with the brand itself. According to Kunde (2000), brands can range from a product base where there is little value other than the name, through to a corporate concept brand where there is a strong and consistent relationship between the consumers, the company and the brand itself. At the highest level is brand religion, where the brand is paramount for consumers, a belief or a religion that enables a range of other products to be introduced within the same 'religious' environment. He quotes Body Shop, Harley-Davidson and Coca-Cola. What is noticeable about this approach is the importance attached to the internal culture and the need to balance the internal and external positioning, a view echoed throughout contemporary corporate branding literature and one thoroughly endorsed and supported in this text.

The name of an organisation is a strong corporate cue as it is often people's first contact with the organisation.

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Abbey National changed its name to *Abbey* in 2003 and at the same time removed a series of sub-brands such as Scottish Provident, Scottish Mutual and Inscape. The change also offered the opportunity to remove its strapline, 'because life's complicated enough'. The change in name accompanies a change in business strategy as the organisation attempts to re-establish itself.

Names used in the telecommunications sector were for a long time dominated by purely descriptive, functionally oriented titles. In 1994 this started to change when Wolff Olins created the Orange brand for Hutchinson Telecom. Orange offered instant differentiation that also reflected the 'different' service being offered for the first time. Owning a 'colour' offered a sense of exclusivity and allowed for a number of creative advertising opportunities (Murphy, 1999).

Some names need to change as a result of a strategic development such as when Group 4 merged with Securicor. The new name G4S, needed to reflect the dimensions of the new global company and its activities in all markets. Some new company names, such as Accenture, which means ascent to the future (see Viewpoint 13.3), have to be developed quickly. Sims (2008) reports that the Andersen Consulting rebrand into Accenture was achieved in just 147 days. Some new names just do not work, such as the new name for the Post Office 'Consignia', which was rejected by many stakeholder groups for many reasons. Some names just fade if not looked after and refreshed. For example, P&O was found to mean slow, had not moved with the times, lacked investment in people and infrastructure and had strong links to the colonial past. Not surprising then that their new owners, DPWorld, concluded that the P&O name lacked brand equity (Sims, 2008).

Behaviour

The behavioural aspect is largely concerned with the way in which employees and managers interact with one another and, more importantly, with external members of the organisation.

The behavioural aspect is largely concerned with the way in which employees and managers interact with one another and, more importantly, with external members of the organisation. The tone of voice used and the actions and consideration of customer needs by employees are often represented within a customer service policy, which is an important part of an organisation's interface with various stakeholder groups.

ViewPoint 13.3 Symbolic Tiger Swings in for Accenture

Accenture is a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company. After renaming itself in 2001, Accenture launched a highly successful rebranding campaign. The new name, derived from 'Accent on the future', was meant to reinforce its new positioning and reflected the organisation's further growth and broadened set of capabilities.

In 2003, Accenture announced that it had entered into an agreement with the world's number one golfer, Tiger Woods. He agreed to represent the company as a symbol of its new high performance business strategy, and the line, 'Go on. Be a Tiger.'

The campaign used pictures of Tiger Woods in golfing situations that demand optimum performance in competitive environments with a focus on winning. The campaign explained how Accenture helps its clients achieve superior economic performance. The campaign utilises the modern-day personification of high performance: Tiger Woods, the world's most iconic golfer.

Following a successful three-year run with the 'Go on. Be a Tiger' campaign, Accenture embarked on a new global campaign based around the line 'We know what it takes to be a Tiger.' This campaign used television, print, outdoor and online advertising to direct audiences to Accenture's High Performance Business site, where the campaign continues with more in-depth educational and interactive components online. The new site includes case studies, podcasts and client success stories designed to substantiate the high performance claim. See Exhibit 13.2 to see how Tiger Woods is used as a metaphor for superior business performance.

Source: http://www.accenture.com/Global/About_Accenture/Sponsorships/AccentureAndTigerWoods.htm

Question

What communication-related risks do you believe Accenture perceived when they signed Tiger Woods in 2003?

Task

If you ran a major consultancy, who would you choose to endorse your business, and why?

Exhibit 13.2 Working together: Accenture and Tiger Woods

These print ads demonstrate the skills and aptitudes that Tiger Woods brings to golf in order to be successful. These are also the high performance attributes that Accenture offers client organisations.

Courtesy of Young and Rubicam New York and Accenture.

Communication is used to inform stakeholders quickly of episodes concerning products and the organisation. This is normally achieved through the use of visual and verbal messages. However, a broad use can be seen in communicating not only values but also the direction the organisation is taking and notable traits of which the organisation wishes to inform its audiences. For example, in the United Kingdom Volvos were seen as very safe but very dull cars, driven by people who were similarly uninteresting. Communication was used to convey interest and excitement without the loss of the stable and important 'safe' attribute.

When considering the development of a corporate brand, the stewardship dimension also needs to be considered. This refers to the degree of importance that a company places on the development and maintenance of a corporate brand. The steward of the corporate brand is responsible for the consistency of the brand, in terms of the way it is presented, and for the way in which external members develop their images of the organisation. The chairman of British Airways, Willie Walsh, might be accused of not stewarding the British Airways brand appropriately during the company's transition to Terminal 5 in March 2008. This was manifest in the initial chaos, mountain of lost baggage, cancelled flights, staff unrest and swathes of customer anger. Vision and responsibility for this function often reside with 'the chairman' but many companies who successfully take care of their identity also have one communications professional charged with the task (Ferguson, 1996), operating at a very senior level within the organisation.

Much of this is an external perspective of identity, whereas much of the organisational behaviour literature sees identity as embedded within the organisation, with employees. Employees are members who sense identity and who are responsible for projecting their group identity to non-members, those outside the organisation. Identity develops through feelings about what is central, distinctive and enduring (Albert and Whetten, 1985) about the character of the organisation, drawn from the personality (see Chapter 30 for greater detail).

Identity develops through feelings about what is central, distinctive and enduring.

ViewPoint 13.4 Time to close and no sense of responsibility?

In 2007 the Royal Mail announced that 2,500 UK post offices were to close, on the grounds that they were inefficient and lost money. The announcement triggered a huge amount of public controversy and debate because of the impact on older people and the effect the closures would have on the rural communities, among others.

Just after the announcement the Post Office ran a television campaign featuring the services targeted at the over 50s, one of the segments it was about to deprive of its services.

In much the same way the CEO of Barclays Bank decided in the summer of 2000 to announce closures to the branch network (retail outlets). One of the problems with this was that the closures affected many rural communities and attracted a great deal of hostile publicity and negative media comment. This should have been anticipated and measures put in place to ameliorate the damage. Unfortunately, the bank authorised an advertising campaign to run at exactly the same time. The problem was that the corporate branding campaign was national and it focused on functional positioning issues, namely the size of the bank.

The timing of both these announcements was 'unfortunate' as the credibility of the messages was lost in the welter of negative comment about the closures. Perhaps a different approach to social responsibility might have avoided the negative impact on both organisations' reputation.

Question

Is this an example of symbolism or behaviour? Why?

Task

Makes notes about how organisations should conduct themselves with regard to social responsibility.

Corporate communication enables stakeholders to form images about the organisation, from the various corporate communication cues. Therefore, corporate identity is the way the organisation presents itself to its stakeholders.

Corporate image

The third and final element is corporate image. This is the perception that different audiences have of an organisation and results from the audience's interpretation of the cues presented by an organisation. As Bernstein (1984) says, 'the image does not exist in the organisation but in those that perceive the organisation'. This means that an organisation cannot change its image in a directly managed way, but it can change its identity. It is through the management of its identity that an organisation can influence the image held of it.

The image stakeholders hold of an organisation is a result of a particular combination of a number of different elements, but is essentially a distillation of the values, beliefs and attitudes that an individual or organisation has of the focus organisation. The images held by members of the distribution network, for example, may vary according to their individual experiences, and will almost certainly be different from those that management thinks exists. This means that an organisation does not have a single image, but may have multiple images.

For an image to be sustainable, the identity cues around which the image is fashioned must be based on reality and reflect the values and beliefs of the organisation. Images can be consistent, but are often based on a limited amount of information. Images are prone to the halo effect, whereby stakeholders shape images based on a small amount of information. The strategic credibility of Microsoft may be based largely on the image of Bill Gates rather than the current financial performance of Microsoft and the actual strategies being pursued by the organisation. Stakeholders extrapolate that Bill Gates has a high reputation for business success, therefore, anything to do with Bill Gates is positive and likely to be successful.

Corporate images are shaped by stakeholder interpretations of the identity cues they perceive at an individual level. These cues are the identity signals transmitted by organisations, either deliberately planned and timed or accidental, often unknown to the organisation and very often unwelcome. Planned corporate communications reflected through symbolism, communication and behaviour are accompanied by unplanned communications such as those generated by competitors, through word-of-mouth and the personal experiences and memories of the individual (Cornelissen, 2000).

Corporate images are shaped by stakeholder interpretations of the identity cues they perceive.

Corporate image is what stakeholders perceive the organisation to be.

Dimensions of corporate image

The image that stakeholders have of organisations is important for many reasons. The main ones are listed in Table 13.4, where it can be observed that the dimensions of corporate image are quite diverse.

The relational dimension refers to the exchange of attitudes and perceptions with stakeholders of the organisation itself. As will be seen later, organisations consider who they are and what they would like to be, and then project identity cues to those stakeholders who it is believed need to be informed. A more advanced understanding then allows for the adaptation of the organisation based on the feedback or the dialogue thus created.

Management also benefits from corporate identity programmes as they encourage senior staff to reflect on the organisation's sense of purpose and then provide a decision framework for the decisions that management and others, perhaps functional managers, follow.

The final dimension refers to the advantages that a strong positive identity can give products and services. It is possible to develop more effective and efficient promotional programmes by focusing on the organisation's distinctiveness and then allow for the ripple to wash over the

Table 13.4 Dimensions of corporate image

Image dimension	Elements of perception
Relational	Government, local community, employees, network members.
Management	Corporate goals, decision-making, knowledge, understanding.
Product	Product endorsement and support, promotional distinctiveness, competitive advantages.

variety of offerings. Banks have traditionally used this approach, and car manufacturers have also partially attempted this strategy. Although the car marque (brand) is a very important decision determinant (e.g. BMW, Audi, Honda, VW, Toyota), it is common for particular models within the marque to be featured heavily.

Apart from a positive relationship between reputation and corporate performance, the principal reasons for managing corporate identity are to make clear to all stakeholders what the values and beliefs of the organisation are and how it is striving to achieve its objectives. In addition, a strong reputation provides better opportunities to develop lasting relationships with key stakeholder groups and improved access to resources. There are a number of secondary benefits, but these distil down to creating a supportive environment for the offerings, employees and external stakeholders associated with the organisation. Finally, a strong reputation can provide some protection should an organisation encounter environmental turbulence or crisis.

Corporate reputation

Corporate reputation refers to an individual's reflection of the historical and accumulated impacts of previous identity cues, fashioned in some cases by near or actual transactional experiences.

A deeper set of images constitute what is termed corporate reputation. This concept refers to an individual's reflection of the historical and accumulated impacts of previous identity cues, fashioned in some cases by near or actual transactional experiences. It is much harder and takes a lot longer to change reputation, whereas images may be influenced quite quickly. The latter is more transient and the former more embedded.

This view of reputation, that image is different to reputation, is regarded as part of the 'differentiated' school of thought, but is a view not held by all writers. Gotsi and Wilson (2001) argue that although in the minority, authors such as Kennedy (1977) see the two terms as having the same meaning while authors such as Alvesson (1998), Dichter (1985) and Dutton *et al.* (1994) regard the terms as interchangeable. The view held here is that they are not interchangeable but interrelated, if only because reputations are developed through time, whereas images can be instantaneous and reality superficial. A strong reputation is considered strategically important for four main reasons:

A strong reputation is considered strategically important for four main reasons.

- a primary means of differentiation when there is little difference at product level;
- a support facility during times of turbulence and as a measure of corporate value (Greyser, 1999);
- the effect on a company's share price, perhaps as much as 15 per cent (Cooper, 1999);
- the higher the quality of customer relationships, the higher the reputation afforded the organisation (Broon, 2007).

In a survey reported by Gray (2000) the importance of a company's reputation was regarded by 1,005 CEOs consulted to be either important or very important. Fombrun (1996) claims that in order to build a favourable reputation four attributes need to be developed. These are credibility, trustworthiness, reliability and responsibility. Using these criteria it may be possible to speculate about the reputation developed by a company such as Nokia, the mobile phone manufacturer. Credibility is established through its range of products, which are perceived to be of high quality and branded. Trustworthiness has been developed through attention to customer service and support. Reliability and consistency have been achieved by setting and adhering to particular standards of quality, and responsibility is verified through a strong orientation to service and values manifested through the company's strong product development and innovation policy.

Reputation itself is developed through a number of variables. Greyser (1999) suggests that the key drivers are competitive effectiveness, market leadership, customer focus, familiarity/favourability, corporate culture and communications. It is the combination of these elements that drives corporate reputation. However, he states that the most important dimension impacting on reputation is the relationship between expectation and action. Whether this be at corporate level or at product/brand level, the brand promise must be delivered if reputation is to be enhanced, otherwise damage to the corporate reputation is most likely.

Despite their overall and continued marketing success, it would appear that the reputation of corporate brands can be tarnished. However, it is the strength of the brand, management's flexibility and willingness to be open and transparent with inquisitive publics that can protect reputation in the long run.

ViewPoint 13.5 Who cracked the Egg?

McDonald's, British Airways, Microsoft, Nike, Coca-Cola and Perrier are just some of the leading global brands that have been subject to media or judicial investigation. As a result of being in the public spotlight, their corporate reputation might be questioned, spoof web sites created and doubt expressed about their integrity and well-being.

Many of these brands represent a benchmark for marketing performance. Using highly recognisable visual identity cues (e.g. 'golden arches', 'national flags', packaging or unique logos) consistently throughout the world, these brands are normally associated with high standards of service, good value for money and wide availability. To help maintain their identity, huge sums are spent each year on advertising, public relations and relevant in-house training and support.

In 2008, Egg decided to withdraw the credit cards of 161,000 of its customers. It was claimed that the credit profiles of these customers had deteriorated. However, counter-claims were made by many of the affected customers, who stated that they paid off their credit bills promptly. This action is all the more remarkable as the Egg brand was developed by providing a high-quality customer service and by making the brand accessible. The enormous publicity accompanying the 'sacking of its customers' was thought to have severely damaged the brand.

Source: Odal (2008).

Question

Were Egg right to get rid of their unprofitable customers?

Task

Find a brand whose reputation has been damaged and determine how management have tried to restore their reputation.

Understanding the tasks of corporate identity

The gap between organisational image and identity, often uncovered during research, determines the nature of the communications task. A communications strategy is required to address all matters of structure and internal communications and the conflicting needs of different stakeholders so as to produce a set of consistent messages, all within the context of a coherent corporate identity programme. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) changed its identity partly as a means of enabling it to compete more effectively in an environment that was changing quickly. With the then emergence of digital television, the developing international competitive arena and the impending launch a range of new services it was important that the BBC logo became distinctive and reflected the BBC core values of quality, fairness, accuracy and artistic integrity. The previous identity was expensive (four-colour), not suitable for the increasing volumes and range of applications, had become fragmented and reproduced in an inconsistent manner. In addition, it did not work on digital formats and was technically difficult to integrate with other graphics. The new identity signalled changes about the BBC and the culture, attitudes and behaviour of the people who work there.

Analysis of the perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders towards an organisation will often reveal the size of the gap between actual and desired perception.

Analysis of the perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders towards an organisation will often reveal the size of the gap between actual and desired perception. The nature and size of the gap will determine the task and objectives necessary to close the gap. This corporate perception gap may be large or small, depending upon who the stakeholder is. Organisations have multiple images and must develop strategies that attempt to stabilise, and if possible equalise, the images held.

Using a four-cell matrix (see Figure 13.3), where the vertical axis scales the size of the perceived gap and the horizontal axis the number of stakeholders who share the same perception, a series of strategies can be identified. Should a large number of stakeholders be perceived to hold an image of an organisation that is a long way from reality, then a correction strategy is required to communicate the desired position and performance of the focus organisation. Most common of these is the gap between perceived corporate

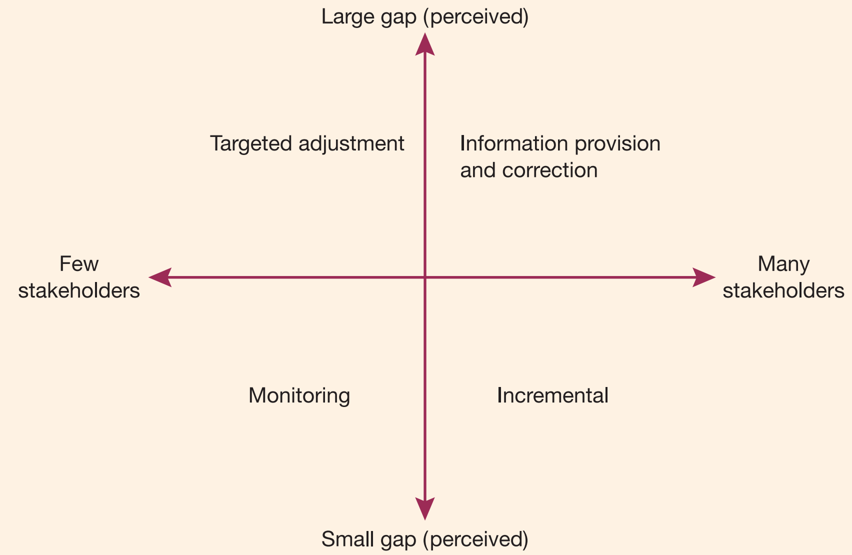

Figure 13.3 Corporate perception gap

performance and the real performance of the organisation when put in the context of the actual trading conditions.

If a small number of stakeholders perceive a large gap, then a targeted adjustment strategy would be required, aimed at particular stakeholder groups and taking care to protect the correct image held by the majority of stakeholders. For example, some students perceive some financial institutions (e.g. banks) as not particularly attractive for career progression or compatible with their own desired lifestyles. A targeted adjustment strategy would be necessary by the banks to alter this perception in order that they attract the necessary number of high-calibre graduates.

Should research uncover a small number of stakeholders holding a relatively small disparity between reality and image, a monitoring strategy would be appropriate and resources would be better deployed elsewhere. The best position would be if the majority of stakeholders perceived a small difference, in which case a maintenance strategy would be advisable and the good corporate communications continued. The natural extension of this approach is to use it as a base tool in the determination of the communication budget. Funds could be allocated according to the size of the perceived perception gap.

The reasons for the gap do not necessarily rest solely with stakeholders. If the image they hold is incorrect and the organisation's performance is good, then it is poor communications that are to blame, which are the fault of the organisation. If the image is correct and accurately reflects performance, then management must take the credit or the criticism for their performance as managers (Bernstein, 1984).

Strategy and corporate identity/image

It is taken for granted that measurements of the perceptions that consumers have of brands and offerings are taken periodically. This practice varies with each organisation and industry, but the overall tendency is to take such measurements on an ad hoc basis. As well as measuring the strength of perception of the organisation's offerings, measurements should also be taken of the perceptions that stakeholders have of the organisation. It may be that the marketing communications have to realign perceptions of the organisation before new offerings can be launched successfully.

In Figure 13.4 the perceptions that customers have of four recruitment companies are presented. The axes used show the levels of awareness and attitude towards the service provided by each of the companies, and for the sake of discussion each company is depicted in one of the four quadrants. Company A is in the strongest position and its communications should be aimed at maintaining its current position. Company B is liked just as much as A, but known only to a limited audience. Work needs to be undertaken to improve levels of awareness by reaching a larger number of stakeholders. Company C, to those that are aware of it, is seen as a poor organisation, but fortunately only a few know about it. Management's task is to bring about improvements to its offering and delay informing stakeholders until the level of service is satisfactory. Company D is seen to suffer from poor service delivery and everyone knows about it. Management's task is to lower the level of awareness, or not actively increase it, and put right the service offering before seeking stakeholder attention.

This depiction is obviously a simplification, as corporate image is multidimensional (Dowling, 1986) and there is no single indicator that can adequately reflect the corporate personality. As different stakeholders will inevitably have different images, the measurement of corporate image is made difficult.

Various models have been developed to provide a visual interpretation of the elements involved in corporate identity (Kennedy, 1977; Dowling, 1986; Abratt and Shee, 1989; Stuart, 1999b). These models reflect the development of the subject and the growing integrative nature

Various models have been developed to provide a visual interpretation of the elements involved in corporate identity.

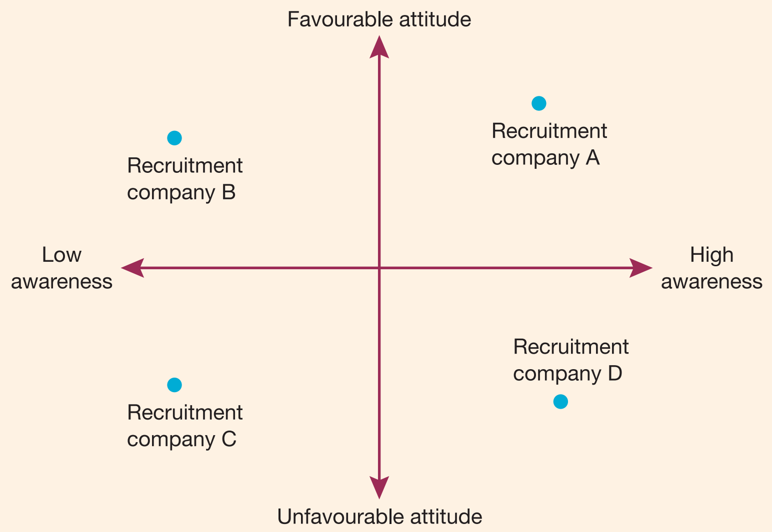

Figure 13.4 Images held by stakeholders of four recruitment companies
Source: Adapted from Barich and Kotler (1991).

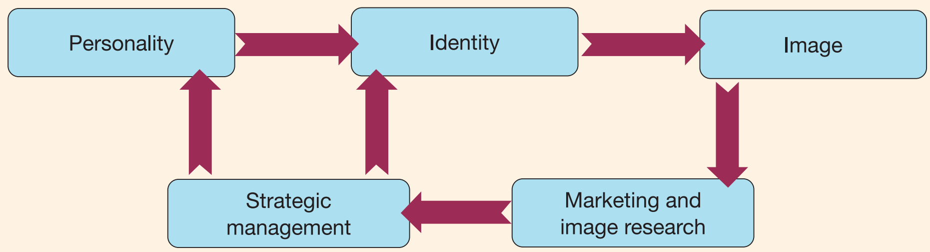

Figure 13.5 The corporate identity management process
Source: Adapted from Markwick and Fill (1997).

of corporate identity within an organisation's overall strategy. One such framework, presented by Markwick and Fill (1997), is entitled the corporate identity management process (CIMP) (see Figure 13.5), which depicts the three main elements of the process as identified by Abratt and Shee (1989): corporate personality, corporate identity and corporate image. In order for management to be able to use such a model there must be understanding of the linkages between the components. Just as the linkages in the value chain determine the extent of competitive advantage that may exist, so the linkages within the corporate identity process need to be understood in order to narrow the gap between reality and perception.

To assist with the linking process, van Riel's (1995) composition of corporate communication is used. These are marketing, management and organisational communications. The first linkage is to transpose, through self-analysis, the corporate personality so that management, or those responsible for the management of the corporate identity, have a realistic perception of the corporate personality. This can be assumed to be what management thinks the personality is and the principal method is through management communication.

The second linkage is between corporate identity and the corporate image. In order that stakeholders are able to perceive and understand the organisation, the corporate identity is projected to them. The identity can be projected with orchestrated cues, planned and delivered to a timed schedule, or it can be projected as a series of random, uncoordinated events and observations. In virtually all cases, corporate identity cues are a mixture of the planned (e.g. literature, telephone style and ways of conducting business) and the unplanned (e.g. employees' comments, media views and product failures). The principal linkages are through organisation and marketing communications.

The second linkage is between corporate identity and the corporate image.

All organisations communicate all the time; everything they make, do, say or do not say is a form of communication. The totality of the way the organisation presents itself, and is visible, can be called its identity (Olins, 1989). Corporate image is how stakeholders actually perceive the identity. It is, of course, unlikely that all stakeholders will hold the same image at any one point in time. Owing to the level of noise and the different experiences stakeholders have of an organisation, multiple images of an organisation are inevitable (Dowling, 1986). It is important that organisations monitor these images to ensure that the (corporate) position is maintained.

The totality of the way the organisation presents itself, and is visible, can be called its identity.

The third linkage is between the image that stakeholders have of an organisation and the corporate strategy formulation and implementation processes that an organisation adopts. This research-based linkage provides feedback and enables the organisation to adjust its personality and its identity, thus consequently affecting the cues presented to stakeholders. Image research is an important method of linking back into the strategy process.

The cues used to project the corporate identity are many and varied; some are controllable and others beyond the reach of management. These cues include the logo and letterheads, the way employees speak of the organisation, the buildings and architecture, the perception of the ability of the organisation to fulfil its obligations, its technical skills, prices, dress code, competitor communications, word-of-mouth and the way the telephone is answered. Of all these and the many others, however, research needs to determine those attributes that key stakeholders perceive as important.

Having determined the important attributes, stakeholders should be asked to evaluate how well the organisation rates on each of them and how well it performs on each attribute in comparison with competitors.

ViewPoint 13.6 Shell reserves, restructures and confuses

Shell announced in 2004 that it was to restructure itself in the light of the catastrophe relating to the organisation's overstated oil reserves and the subsequent impact on its share price and obvious perceived value for shareholders.

This example demonstrates the principles of the CIMP framework cycle rather neatly. The 100-year-old company had operated a dual structure based on the joint venture between Shell Transport and Trading (the UK arm) and the Royal Dutch of the Netherlands. The announcement saw an end to this structure and a single organisation established, making it leaner, tighter and much more capable of making faster decisions. However, the cycle of poor performance, damaged reputation, structural and strategy change will impact on the culture and values of the organisation and alter, in some way, the personality of the organisation. This in turn will feed through to the identity and branding cues and the images that stakeholders form of the new Shell organisation.

From an identity perspective Shell celebrated its 60-year technical partnership with the Ferrari Formula One team with a campaign that shows Formula One cars racing around city circuits, apparently using Shell's high performance fuel. Considering the environmental pressures, the green claims of BP and a subsequent

Shell campaign that focused on the organisation's environmental awareness, this identity strategy appears to be sending contradictory messages.

Sources: Various; Quilter (2007); www.shell.co.uk.

Question

Are there any simple rules in order to manage corporate reputation?

Task

Visit the Shell web site and view their online videos on their approach to the environment.

Exhibit 13.3 Shell's sponsorship and support of Formula One racing is compatible with the company's core business activities and provides opportunities to reach a global audience.
Courtesy of Shell Brands International AG.

Stakeholder images can also be determined on three dimensions: the importance of attributes, organisational performance against the attributes and performance with respect to competitors on the same attributes. A three-dimensional perception matrix (Figure 13.6) draws out the significant points. The ideal position occurs when high customer and competitor ratings are recorded for important attributes. When the attribute has a low level of importance it may be that the organisation's effort is misdirected, and management should reduce the effort spent on developing this image or seek alternative markets where this attribute has higher levels of importance. The worst position occurs when the organisation underperforms with respect to the customers' requirements and the competition on an attribute that is important. A change of strategy is required.

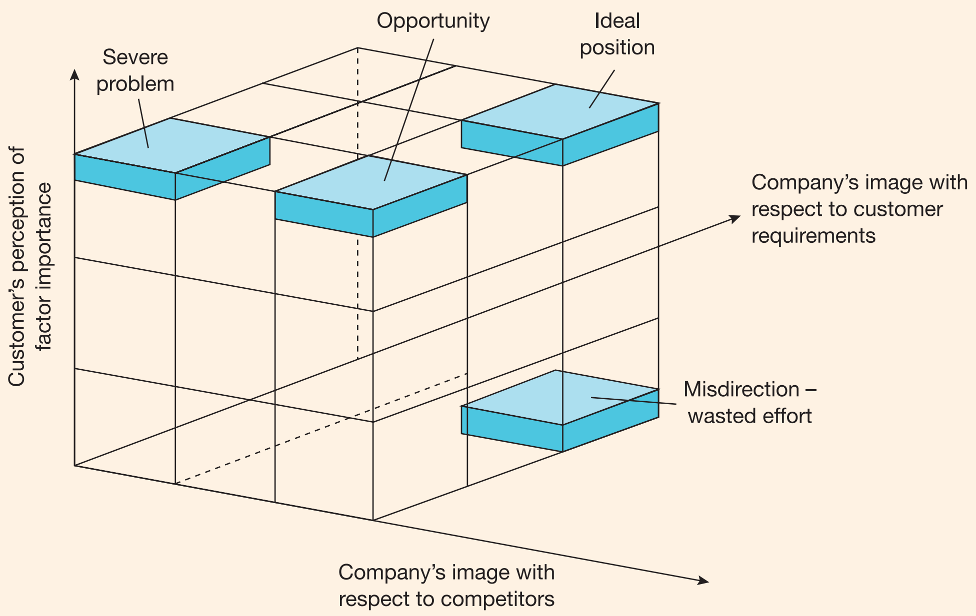

Figure 13.6 A three-dimensional attribute perception matrix
Source: Markwick (1993). Used with kind permission.

Effort should be concentrated on developing either corporate identity or personality in areas where the customer rating is poor and competitor rating is high on a factor that is important.

This model reveals that, by understanding the strength of images held by key stakeholders across attributes that are important to them, corrective action may be required to the personality and cues presented to stakeholders as part of the identity process. Strategic development therefore can result from an understanding of the images held about an organisation by its stakeholders.

Therefore, for the CIMP framework to be complete, management is required to analyse and interpret the research data and then use management and marketing communications either to develop the personality or to provide adjusted corporate identity cues for positioning and goal-setting purposes. This is not the only corporate identity framework to have been developed. For example, Stuart (1999b) developed the CIMP framework and offered a composite framework drawing on a variety of models and Balmer and Gray (1999) formulated a new model of the corporate identity–corporate communications process. Each of these has developed our understanding of this subject and extended the breadth and depth of corporate identity, branding and reputation management.

It may be concluded that corporate identity is not a peripheral tool to be used ad hoc, but is a component that is central to the strategic management process. It should be used regularly by managers to understand how the organisation is being interpreted and understood by different stakeholders and to understand the essence of the organisation and whether the symbolic, behavioural and communication cues are contextually appropriate. Managing an organisation's identity and reputation is a complex, variable and necessary aspect of developing stakeholder relationships in the twenty-first century.

Summary

In order to help consolidate your understanding of corporate identity and reputation, here are the key points summarised against each of the learning objectives:

1. Examine the key concepts associated with corporate identity.

Corporate identity is concerned with the set of meanings by which an organisation allows itself to be known and through which it enables others to describe, remember and relate to it. People form images of an organisation based on the cues or signals that organisations transmit. These cues may be sent deliberately or they may be accidental or unintended. Therefore, corporate identity is concerned with an organisation's personality, its identity, image and the reputation that develops over time.

2. Understand the difference between corporate branding and corporate identity.

Corporate brands are developed from their identity and, unlike traditional approaches to corporate messages, are primarily concerned with the delivery of specific corporate promises. Corporate brands are a complex form of identity but not all organisations need a corporate brand, if, for example, they are a public utility, monopoly or work in commodities.

3. Consider some of the ideas and issues associated with corporate communications.

Organisations project themselves (as they want to be seen/understood) through a series of 'cues'. These are then interpreted by stakeholders and used to create an image of the organisation. This corporate image may or may not be the intended interpretation but this perception is an important one and must be treated seriously. Reputations are developed over time from the image and can be seen to feed back to the corporate personality and impact on the way members of an organisation think about themselves and determine what is central, distinctive and enduring.

Communication strategies need to encompass the communication needs of all those other stakeholders, those other constituencies that might influence the organisation or be influenced by it. These approaches are referred to as the profile strategy and so complete the 3Ps for communication: push, pull and profile.

Profile strategies are essentially concerned with communication about the organisation itself rather than its products and/or services. The focus rests with the corporate body: who it is, what it is, what it is seeking to do and how it is important to other stakeholders.

4. Understand the core elements associated with corporate identity.

There are three main elements central to the corporate identity process. These are corporate personality, identity and image. Individuals and organisations project their personalities through their identity. The audience's perception of the identity is the image they have of the object, in this case, the corporate body. The identity is communicated through symbolism and behaviour.

5. Explain the meaning and importance of corporate reputation.

Corporate reputation is concerned with the deeper set of images and refers to an individual's reflection of the historical and accumulated impacts of previous identity cues, fashioned in some cases by near or actual transactional experiences. It is much harder and takes a lot longer to change reputation, whereas images may be influenced quite quickly. The latter is more transient and the former more embedded.

A strong reputation is considered strategically important for three main reasons: as a primary means of differentiation when there is little difference at product level, as a support facility during times of turbulence and as a measure of corporate value.

6. Introduce a framework incorporating corporate identity into the process of strategic management.

The corporate identity management process (CIMP) depicts the three main elements corporate personality, corporate identity and corporate image. These are supplemented by research data and information that is then used by management to develop the personality or to provide adjusted corporate identity cues for positioning and goal-setting purposes.

In order for management to be able to use such a model there must be understanding of the linkages between the components. Just as the linkages in the value chain determine the extent of competitive advantage that may exist, so the linkages within the corporate identity process need to be understood in order to narrow the gap between reality and perception.

Review questions

1. What are the main elements within corporate communications.
2. Explain what a corporate brand is. How does it differ from a product brand?
3. Discuss the differences between corporate branding and corporate identity. Are the differences of any value?
4. What are the main facets of corporate personality?
5. Describe the personality or defining characteristics of five organisations. What are their distinctive differences?
6. Prepare brief notes explaining what corporate identity is. Set out the differences between personality and identity.
7. Suggest ways in which planned and unplanned corporate identity cues are presented to stakeholders. Use an organisation with which you are familiar to illustrate your answer.
8. What is corporate image and how does it differ from corporate identity?
9. Draw the CIMP model, paying particular attention to the linkages between the components.
10. Discuss the view that there is nothing intrinsically different between corporate image and reputation.

MiniCase Just how branded is the NHS?

Karl Milner: Director of Communications and Public Relations, NHS Yorkshire and the Humber
Graham Hughes: Leeds Metropolitan University

Background – the changing environment

By its very nature, the NHS continues to operate in a complex and changing environment, which it can be argued is becoming more competitive both internally and externally. This clearly represents something of a challenge in corporate branding terms. The success of the NHS is crucially significant to the government and to all those who rely on its effective performance. Prime Minister, Gordon Brown (2007) states,

> No institution touches the lives of the British people like the NHS. It is part of what makes Britain the place it is. Yet, no modern health service that aspires to respond to its citizens' needs and expectations can afford to stand still.

More recent announcements by both the Prime Minister and the Health Secretary highlight the focus on the NHS agenda as a major government priority.

The differing NHS regions and providers attract people to the services they offer. Private providers, BUPA *et al.*, are becoming more aggressive in targeting customers often disenchanted with the offerings from the public sector. This is in part aided by growth in the provision of private health insurance. Some patients are seeking treatment in other parts of Europe and further afield. There is a significant body of service users who hold negative perceptions and attitudes toward the NHS (MRSA, waiting lists, service closures and reductions, meeting of treatment targets). These perceptions and attitudes may be based on actual experience or as a result of information gained from various media sources, some of which come officially and unofficially from NHS staff. There is a shift toward the more social aspects of the service provision, promotion of healthier lifestyles and personal well-being. Life expectancy levels are extending.

There is a changing shift in NHS strategic agenda to be:

- patient centred;
- clinically led;
- locally accountable.

The NHS brand

Peoples' expectations of getting good 'customer service' are increasing all the time. This is not just applicable in situations where there might be a direct alternative choice but in all those situations where service is provided in both public and private sectors. This might include services provided by local authorities as well as the myriad of other public service offerings, including those of the NHS. There is an increasing need to recognise that just because service users may not have a choice, they should (and will) expect and receive a service that will not only satisfy their needs, but also that they will feel positively toward the provider on an ongoing basis.

These issues are clear indicators that the NHS needs to rethink its position as a health service provider and the relationships it has with a range of different stakeholders.

What is the current position?

The diagram below, *the NHS brand spheres*, indicates the scope of the brands directly and indirectly associated with the NHS. At a 'macro' level, NHS as a central, government-controlled service is well known. The concept that people pay a proportion of their earnings through taxation and national insurance contributions which funds the NHS and other services, again is well known but perhaps not well understood in terms of its detailed structures. Expectations that the service is 'free' have become increasingly blurred as some aspects of the service have changed the focus and nature of their provision, dentistry for example. The spheres identify the range of brand levels, those that might be considered to be corporate in nature to those at a product or service level.

For some users, the NHS brand is seen as their known service provider, the GP or the local hospital. Others might recognise it through the sound and visual impact of the ambulance service. These are tangible and real points of service recognition and identity. The media provides for a whole range of NHS-related points of identity. Some might be news and information sources specific to actual parts of the NHS service provision at a local or national level. Further complexities

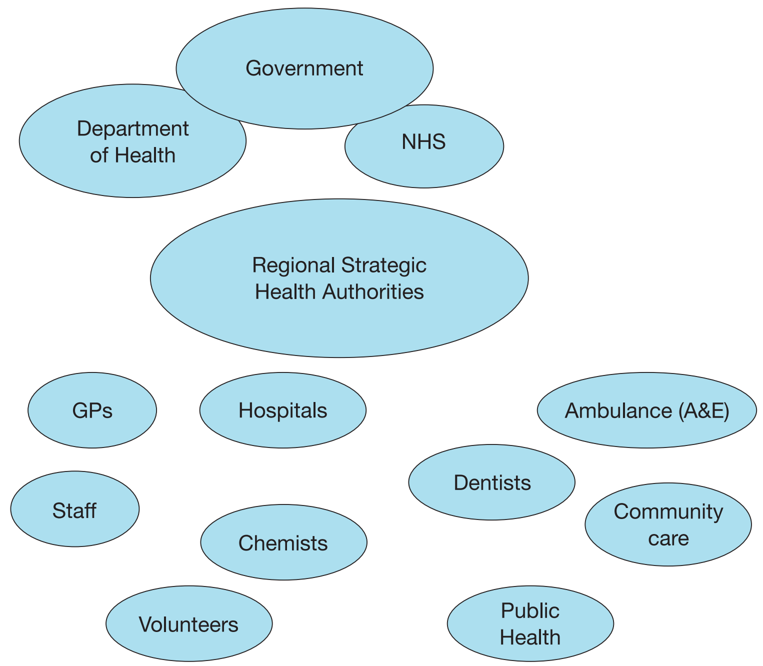

Figure 13.7 NHS brand spheres

arise when considering the growth in and popularity of health drama series such as *Casualty* or *Holby City* and the impact they can have on peoples' knowledge and understanding of the NHS, perception and reality. We live in an information-rich society in which so-called word-of-mouth (driven by Internet and mobile technologies) communication plays a significant role in providing information to large numbers of people very rapidly.

In addition to the corporate NHS brand(s), the service ranges provide for another level of service and brand structure at regional/local level including:

- GP services;
- hospital outpatient services;
- A & E;
- hospital in-patient services;
- ambulance service;
- dentist service;
- community care;
- walk-in centres.

Each of these services might be considered differently in terms of how the brand essence is made up. Brand attributes, benefits and personality traits might vary significantly.

There are individual parts of the service that have themselves developed a form of brand recognition as a result of developing a reputation for some part or the whole of their provision. For some this might be at a local, regional or national level. Examples might include individual hospitals – Great Ormond Street, Addenbrooke's in Cambridge, or St James in Leeds. Two of these provide interesting aspects of branding in that they are well known nationally in 'shorthand'- as *GOSH* and *Jimmys* with subsequent emotional legacies.

The regional geographic structure NHS could facilitate another level of brand perspectives. This could form the basis of creating a decentralised brand identity that would be something that individuals might recognise and associate with as a basis for forming a relationship – disaggregated from nationally driven issues. This might also have benefits in attempting to '*de-politicise*' perceptions of the NHS, for it to be considered on the basis of the services provided and away from the national media glare. This would not mean that major issues could be ignored, but presented in a more focused regional/local context allowing for more a more rational and meaningful approach.

Medical treatments quite clearly form the basis of the NHS raison d'être. As such they form an integral element of the brand. How, by whom and where these treatments are delivered are also significant contributors to the brand identity. Thus the staff and operational environments play an important role, just as they do in more commercially based branded sectors, retail and financial service sectors for example. This in itself provides a platform for brand development – *internal branding.*

The NHS brand development needs to be based on a time perspective that is sustainable, both in terms of maintaining core values and being able to respond to significant change.

MiniCase questions

1. Using the model associated with corporate perceptions gaps, identify how this might apply within the NHS context.
2. Explain how the different dimensions of corporate image might apply within the NHS.
3. Provide examples of planned and unplanned cues in communications associated with corporate identity management process of the NHS.

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