

Model: Corporate Identity & Corporate Image Model

Type of model: Brand model (structure model)
 Author(s): Birkigt & Stadler
 Domain: Identity and Image

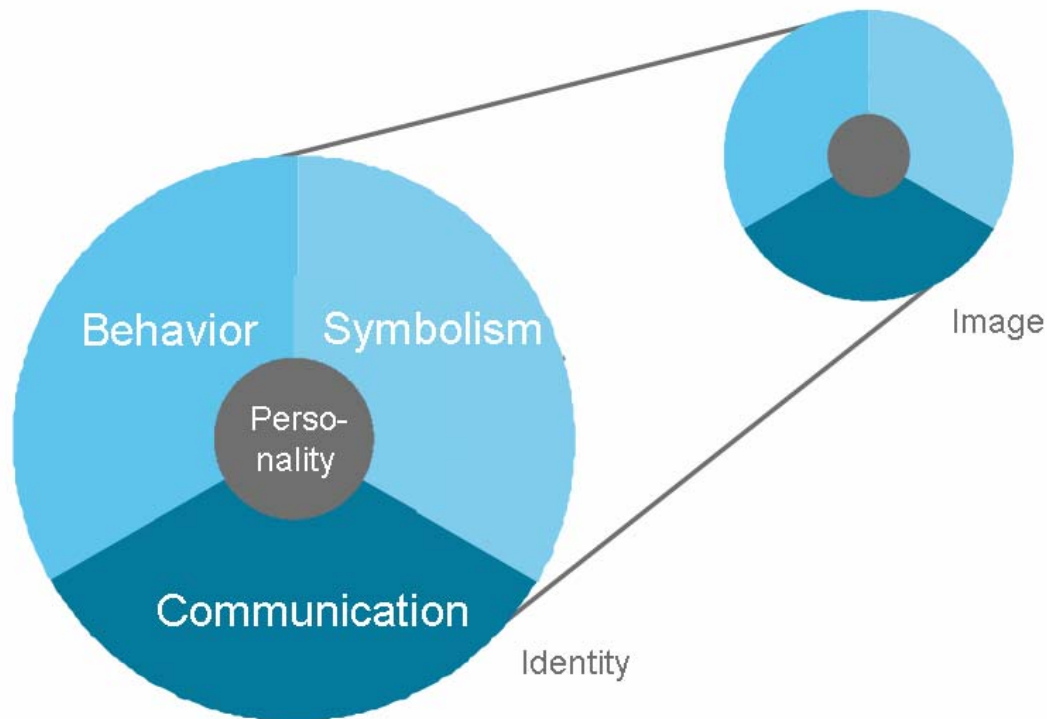


Figure 1: The relationship between corporate identity and corporate image according to Birkigt and Stadler.

In their corporate identity / corporate image model, Birkigt and Stadler identify four dimensions of corporate identity. Three 'instruments' (in the outer circle) form the concrete manifestations of the underlying 'personality' of the organisation (core of the circle). Corporate identity relates to the total scope of manifestations (symbolism, advertising and behaviour) an organisation uses to propagate its personality.

Personality can best be described as 'that what the organisation really is'. The corporate image is, in turn, a reflection of the corporate identity of the company (although this reflection is in practice never one on one). There are, after all, various other factors impacting on the representation of an organisation, such as the rumour mill, scandals and a negative press.

This model enables managers to gain insight into the (lack of) balance between the identity and the existing image of a company. When the image is more favourable than the identity, an organisation potentially runs the risk of seeing its image affected by (negative) publicity. When the identity is more positive than the image, an organisation is simply not making the best use of its image building tools. If required, action can be taken to bring image and identity into line. In the following we will further go into the four dimensions:

1. **Personality:** this can be described as 'the will of the company and the way in which it reacts to stimuli from its surroundings'. Birkigt and Stadler literally refer to this term as 'das manifestierte Selbstverständnis des Unternehmens' (The company's manifested self-image). This implies that (the management of) the company must have accurate self-knowledge, and with that a clear idea of the 'ist' situation, if they want to be able to present the company in a clear manner (through behaviour, advertising and symbolism). Van Riel has split personality up into three focus areas: one of a strategic nature (the mission statement), and two of an organisational nature (corporate culture and structure). The mission statement largely coincides with Birkigt and Stadler's personality concept, but lacks an 'ist' status (because a mission statement always targets the future (i.e. 'soll')). The two focus areas of culture and structure target the way corporate identity is rooted in the organisation.
2. **Symbols:** the symbolism of a company regards the 'images' an organisation uses to reinforce and support its actions at behavioural and communication level. Images generally concern visualisations: photos, illustrations, non-verbal graphics, logos, etc. Symbolism implicitly points at what the organisation stands for (or wants to stand for) and can hence play a key role in the reinforcement of the relationship between an organisation and its internal and external target groups. Symbols can, for example, trigger an awareness-raising process within a company. Visibly being part of a group increases employees' levels of pride in the company, and can boost willingness to collaborate between departments. The most commonly used application of symbolism in a company is what is generally referred to as the 'corporate style'. By harmonizing the visual presentation a company is, on the one hand, broadcasting a coherent image, and, on the other hand, contributing to the shaping and maintaining of the corporate identity. A good real-life example is Van Nelle. This company was the first in the Netherlands to incorporate large glass structures in the architecture of its factory in 1934, in a move to give workers plenty of light and a sense of space to work in. The design specs of that factory explicitly stated that the human element was to be treated with equal importance as the mechanical side. Van Nelle

thus showed, through the style of its factory architecture, its social attitude; an important and recognizable part of the corporate identity.

3. Advertising: Birkigt and Stadler consider advertising to be the total of all verbal or visual messages a company emits. This is the most flexible of the corporate identity instruments, which can also be used as a rapid response tactical instrument. This instrument's flexibility is based on the fact that advertising can transmit abstract signals directly to target groups. A company can, for example, tell its target groups directly that it is innovative. If the company were to only intend to make that known through its behaviour, the process would be a lot slower and tougher going. On the other hand, it is futile to tell target groups something like that, when the communicated message is not backed up by the company's behaviour. The way in which a company communicates with its target groups generally says a great deal about that company's identity. In order to ensure clear and univocal communication, it has to tie in with the other two instruments: behaviour and symbolism.
4. Behaviour: This is the most important and most handy corporate identity instrument of a company. In the end, consumers will judge a company by its actions. It is, of course, always possible to highlight certain behaviour aspects through advertising and/or symbolism in order to steer the image into the desired direction.

Reference(s)

- Birkigt, K., Stadler, M.M. (1986), Corporate Identity, Grundlagen, Funktionen, Fallspielen. Verlag Moderne Industrie, Landsberg an Lech.
- Mulders, M. (2007), 75 Managementmodellen [Management Models] (p.122-124). Wolters-Noordhoff, Groningen. *
- Riel, van C. (1992), Identiteit en imago (een inleiding in de corporate communication) [Identity and Image (an introduction to corporate communication)] (p.30-74). Academic Service, Schoonhoven. *

* : available in the EURIB library.