

Dissertation: 'Flipping the identity coin'

Mirdita Elstak's dissertation on corporate identity discerns two approaches:

- Bottom-up (the inductive approach): a corporate identity is formed by employees; the so-called *perceived* corporate identity.
- Top-down (the deductive approach): a company's corporate identity is defined by top-level management. Elstak makes a further distinction here:
 - *projected* identity; the identity as claimed and communicated by the management, and:
 - *desired* identity; the identity that the management would like to see realized in the future.

Elstak observes that researchers often adhere to one of the abovementioned approaches. In her dissertation, she looks into the different approaches simultaneously.

One of the key conclusions/implications of this research is that the two-sided approach of the corporate identity concept provides greater insight into the role corporate identity plays in corporate processes. As it turns out, it is not so much the attractiveness of the so-called perceived corporate identity that matters for identification with the company and desired behaviour, but rather how the perceived identity relates to the identity desired and projected by management. It is, in other words, more about getting the balance between the three types of identity right than about optimizing one of the three identity types.

Above finding closely tallies with the importance social psychologists attach to the concept of identity congruence. *Identity congruence* (i.e. the extent to which employees identify with the company) occurs when there is a high level of consistency between employees' corporate identity perception, the corporate identity claimed by top-level management, and the corporate identity desired by top-level management. This finding leads to the conclusion that a company's management plays a key role in ensuring employees identify with the company and display the desired behaviour.

Reference(s)

Elstak, M.N. (2007), Flipping the identity coin (the comparative effect of perceived, projected and desired organizational identity on organizational identification and desired behavior). ERIM/ Erasmus Institute of Management, RSM Erasmus University, Rotterdam. *

* : Available in the EURIB library.